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COLLECTED ESSAYS AND PAPERS

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VOLUME IV
ESSAYS
IN
FRENCH LITERATURE

THE
COLLECTED ESSAYS
AND PAPERS OF
GEORGE
SAINTSBURY
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VOLUME IV



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PREFACE

THE delay of the fourth and French volume of these Collected Essays has not passed without what I hope my readers will not think a disadvantage. I could not, at the earlier date, have asked Mr John Murray for the permission, which he has now very graciously given, to reprint an article on M. Anatole France, as it had then only just appeared in the *Quarterly Review* for January, 1923. And this article, last in the present collection, represents, though so recently written, a familiarity with its subject stretching right back to the same period which saw my early interest in Baudelaire, the subject of the first. Indeed I think M. France is almost the only—as he certainly is by far the most—distinguished remaining representative of literary France before the *other* War.

Besides these thanks to Mr Murray I have to give others, more fully expressed than I was able to express them in the General Preface to Vol. I, to the Curators of the Taylorian Institution at Oxford and their Secretary Professor Joseph Wright for permission to reprint the essay-lecture on Gautier as *A French Man of Letters of All Work*, and to supply the omission of *Chamfort and Rivarol* among the list of papers originally released from the *Fortnightly Review* by its editor and proprietors, and secondarily from *Miscellaneous Essays* by Messrs Percival-Rivington. All the pieces are now dated at their beginning with the years in which they originally appeared, and notes are similarly ticketed. To any one who may be annoyed or “fussed” by this I may again excuse myself by saying that literary history has, in the past, been most woefully confused by the lack of such chronological identifications.

A very few further words may perhaps be allowed on the Baudelaire Essay—a great part of which may be said to date not merely from 1875 but almost ten years earlier. It was in 1866 that a friend, at my request, brought me from Paris the second edition of the *Fleurs du Mal* (Mr Andrew Lang long afterwards gave me the first, which I still have). The four-volume collection of the *Works* had completed my knowledge of the author in the interval. I sent the essay (the first thing of any length or ambition that I ever wrote) without introduction of any kind to the late Lord Morley of Blackburn (then Mr John Morley) who might have seen a few short articles which, for a year or two, I had been contributing to the *Academy*, but could have had no other knowledge of me. He took it straight off on its merits or demerits. I think he told some one later that he had only done such a thing twice or thrice in his editorial life. And from that time till he left off editing he constantly asked me for articles and reviews in the *Fortnightly* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. So I have a sort of predilection for it, which I hope will not cause such revulsion in readers as another kind of too exuberant affection for children does in visitors¹.

G. S.

I ROYAL CRESCENT,
BATH.

July 25, 1924

¹ It may be well to repeat, with necessary additions and corrections, the origin and date list originally given in Vol. I, in the order now appearing: "Charles Baudelaire," *Fortnightly Review*, Oct. 1875; "Gustave Flaubert," *ib.* 1878; "Chamfort and Rivarol," *ib.* Jan. 1879; "Saint-Évremond," *ib.* July, 1879; "A Frame of Miniatures," *Saturday Review*, 1879; "Ernest Renan," *Fortnightly Review*, May, 1880; "A Paradox on Quinet," *National Review*, June, 1883; "The Contrasts of English and French Literature," *Macmillan's Magazine*, March, 1891; "The End of a Chapter," *Blackwood's Magazine*, Jan. 1895; "A French Man of Letters of All Work," Lecture given at the Taylorian Institution, Oxford, Oct. 1904; "Anatole France," *Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1923.

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ESSAYS IN FRENCH LITERATURE

I

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE¹ [1875]

"Ce Baudelaire est une pierre de touche; il déplaît invariablement à tous les imbéciles."

THE above remark is said to have been made (probably with reference rather to the future poet's manner and conversation than to his published works, which were then neither many nor important) when Baudelaire was still a very young man. But the

¹ In the seventeen years which have passed since this essay was written, a little though not very much has been added to our knowledge of Baudelaire. The *Œuvres Posthumes* edited in 1887 by his friend M. Crepet (the editor-publisher of a well-known anthology of French poetry, which is perhaps the best thing of the kind ever done) contained nothing of great importance, but threw further light on his personal character, and gave some fresh writings, with certain additions of biographical information. Specimens of some letters, announced for publication in greater mass, have also recently been printed in a magazine, *Le Livre Moderne*. As to personality, what every intelligent student of human nature had long seen, that Baudelaire's "Satanic" attitudes were mainly if not merely pose, may be said to have been conclusively shown by these recent additions. As to the more important point of the character and influence of his work, I may claim to have been on the winning hand throughout, from days when it appeared to be the losing. Hostile criticism could do no more than was done in M. Scherer's repeated attacks on Baudelaire, and this utmost was useless. It is now admitted in France by critics of principles and tastes most opposed to his own, not merely that Baudelaire has had an influence literally second to none on French poetry since his day, but that after allowing for every drawback in matter and form, no writer of verse equal to him in intense and original poetic quality has appeared in his own country during the second half of the nineteenth century, and hardly any whose thought and expression are so exactly and happily married. I myself never contended for anything more, and shall never be satisfied with anything less. I have been in two minds whether to extend this essay considerably or to leave it, with certain necessary alterations, pretty much as it first appeared. The latter finally seemed the better plan. But I must admit that the epigraph of the paper is no longer absolutely true. *Les imbéciles* also have begun to admire Baudelaire (1892). Here, as in some other cases, I have thought it best to make no important interference with the text. Something, however, will be found in the Preface (1924).

saying still has some force, even though it be illegitimate to infer from it that everybody who does not like Baudelaire is a fool. It is the purpose of the present article to discuss, somewhat more in detail than has yet [1875] been done before an English audience, the claims and peculiarities of one whom the writer regards as the most original, and within his limits the most remarkable, of modern French poets.

There can be no doubt (the remark is not offered as a new one) that no greater misfortune can happen to an author than that he should be ticketed as the exponent of eccentric or unpopular views. When once a name passes into the category of symbols, it is useless to expect careful and candid appreciation of its owner's works, except in the case of a very few persons of exceptionally critical habits or powers. It becomes a matter of course that people of one turn of thinking should use the unlucky type as a sort of spiritual target to be shot at, and if possible hit, according to the measure of their temper and skill. And it becomes generally a matter of course that people, especially young people, of another turn of thinking, should regard the said type with ready-made and indiscriminate admiration, which is perhaps more really harmful to their own critical faculty, and to the reputation of their idol, than the equally ready-made and indiscriminate abuse of others.

However obvious these remarks may be, their appropriateness to the subject of the present article will hardly be denied. Scarcely any author can be mentioned who has suffered more from this sort of random abuse than Charles Baudelaire. Before 1866 probably not one educated Englishman in twenty had even heard of him; but his name was dragged in pretty freely in the controversy which arose about Mr Swinburne's

Poems and Ballads, and from that day to this the unfortunate author of *Fleurs du Mal* has served to point any number of cheap morals, forged by people who most likely never opened a page of his writings. Misapprehension, not to say misrepresentation, is particularly easy in such a case. Modern French literature, excepting certain novels, is, it may be suspected, not particularly familiar to the average Englishman; and, of all departments of French literature, modern French poetry is probably least known to him¹. It is the rarest thing in the world to find an Englishman who is not convinced in his heart of hearts that French poetry is something very like a contradiction in terms; and it would, I should say, be easy to find not a few men of letters who, willing as they may be to pay a certain glib compliment to the names of even Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset, would be sorely puzzled to hit a quotation from *Les Chants du Crépuscule* or *Namouna*. If this be the case with well-known names, how much more with the lesser stars? And yet there is perhaps no French poet more deserving of appreciation in England, certainly there is none whose poetical qualities are so germane to those which we should chiefly affect and reverence on this side of the Channel, as Charles Baudelaire. Of the poet's life it cannot be necessary to say very much. In the notices of Baudelaire by Théophile Gautier, by Charles Asselineau, and others,

¹ It may be objected that we have changed all this. Have we? I think the extraordinary hubbub which was raised not very many months ago over the discovery of M. Paul Verlaine is something of a proof to the contrary. There were even disputes as to priority of right in the said discovery, as of some new star. Now the fact was that M. Verlaine had been perfectly well known, to those who did know, since the early flourishing days of the *Parnasse Contemporain* and the *Renaissance*, that is to say, for nearly a quarter of a century. As for my next sentence, Mr Lewis Morris, a month or two ago, made me feel that I had basely plagiarised him seventeen years beforehand by avowing the very sentiment referred to (1892).

tolerably full details may be found by any one who cares to investigate a history which was not characterised by any remarkable events, except perhaps the melancholy end to which it came. Born in 1821, Baudelaire came in for the second phase of the Romantic movement, of which he was to be one of the most original ornaments. His whole life was, so to say, spent in Paris, the only breaks of importance being an early voyage to India, which was not without effects in colour on part of his works, and the final residence in Belgium, which lasted from the beginning of 1864, until he was brought back to Paris to die of general paralysis.

In general temperament the "farouche Baudelaire" (as his friend Théodore de Banville calls him in the *Odes Funambulesques*) appears to have been singularly typical of a certain class of men of letters, a class which perhaps does not produce the most widely known and appreciated work, and which suffers from excessive and possibly too conscious singularity, but which offers a peculiar attraction to the student and the critic, because it is itself as a rule studious and critical. Fastidiousness is in one word the note of this class, and its fastidiousness accounts at once for its comparative sterility, for the perfection of its work, and for its unpopularity. Generally speaking, extreme fastidiousness in a writer is felt as a kind of rebuke by the reader, who is probably conscious of no such great niceness in himself; and the world at large, if it is not altogether careless of quality, has a certain predilection for quantity. The standard edition of the *Fleurs du Mal* contains but 270 pages of not very closely printed verse, and this (if we add the condemned pieces which amount to some 300 lines, and the poet's prose works, many of which it is true are written with as much care and

elaboration as his verse, and which occupy three or four volumes more of about the same size) represents the result of nearly thirty years of constant work. The prose works, excluding the translation of Poe, consist almost entirely of critical writings, with the exception of the fourth and last volume. This contains a rather remarkable novelette, *La Fanfarlo*, of which we may have occasion to speak again, *Petits Poèmes en Prose*, which fall naturally under the head of the poetical writings, and *Les Paradis Artificiels*, a thing partly original and partly translated or adapted from De Quincey. The genius of the latter writer appears to have had an attraction for Baudelaire nearly equal to that exercised by Edgar Poe, with whom indeed De Quincey, on one of the many sides of his mind, had not a little sympathy. Many of the *Suspiria* are extremely Poësqe; indeed, "Our Ladies of Sorrow," which Baudelaire has translated as only he could translate, completely beats Poe on his own ground. Both authors fall far short of Baudelaire himself as regards depth and fulness of passion, but both have a superficial likeness to him in eccentricity of temperament, and in affection for a certain peculiar mixture of grotesque and horror. But *Les Paradis Artificiels* is chiefly valuable as illustrating well the reason of Baudelaire's affection for this mixture, which has been entirely misconstrued. Wine, haschisch, opium, are interesting to him just as the passion of Delphine is interesting, not at all from a diseased craving for stimulus, still less from the perverse desire which a writer who should have known him better has attributed to him, of "finding beauty in recondite wickedness," but simply as some of the different means to which men and women have been driven in the endeavour to reach the infinite, and avoid the monster which dogs them—Ennui. Any one who

has ever taken the trouble to read the "Au Lecteur" of the *Fleurs du Mal* must feel at once this very note, which is there struck with no uncertain sound. The four volumes of Baudelaire's works might be fairly entitled *De l'Ennui*, for all that they contain is really but an anatomy of this ergotism of the modern spirit under its various forms, with the evasions and prophylactics which its victims have sought or obtained. Perhaps the clearest understanding of Baudelaire's general views may be obtained by comparing the above-mentioned "Au Lecteur" with the two following pieces, the first of which is from the later *Fleurs du Mal*, the last one of the *Poèmes en Prose*.

LA RANÇON

L'homme a pour payer sa rançon
Deux champs au tuf profond et riche,
Qu'il faut qu'il remue et défriche
Avec le fer de la raison ;

Pour obtenir la moindre rose,
Pour extorquer quelques épis,
Des pleurs salis de son front gris
Sans cesse il faut qu'il les arrose.

L'un est l'Art et l'autre l'Amour.
—Pour rendre le juge propice,
Lorsque de la stricte justice
Paraîtra le terrible jour,

Il faudra lui montrer des granges
Pleines de moissons, et des fleurs
Dont les formes et les couleurs
Gagnent le suffrage des Anges.

ENIVREZ-VOUS

Il faut être toujours ivre. Tout est là : c'est l'unique question. Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre il faut vous enivrer sans trêve.

Mais de quoi ? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous.

Et si quelquefois, sur les marches d'un palais, sur l'herbe verte d'un fossé, dans la solitude morne de votre chambre, vous vous réveillez, l'ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue, demandez au vent, à la vague, à l'étoile, à l'oiseau, à l'horloge, à tout ce qui fuit, à tout ce qui gémit, à tout ce qui roule, à tout ce qui chante, à tout

ce qui parle, demandez quelle heure il est; et le vent, la vague, l'étoile, l'oiseau, l'horloge vous répondront, "Il est l'heure de s'enivrer! Pour n'être pas les esclaves martyrisés du Temps, enivrez-vous enivrez vous sans cesse! De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise."

With illustrations of the intoxication of virtue, our poet, I must confess, has not greatly troubled himself; perhaps he felt no call to such a work, perhaps he regarded it as a mere branch of archæology; but I must again repeat that if he has illustrated virtue as virtue but little, he has still less illustrated vice as vice. His amatory studies, like his studies on opium and haschisch, are illustrations of the "ivresse de vin," of the tendency to resort to any stimulant if only it be strong or strange. Such studies are moreover legitimate as forming part of his own "ivresse de poésie," of his labours in tilling the field of art which he has chosen as the means of paying his ransom to Time.

In the same way also, we see the reason and justification, according to this general plan of work and life, of the critical studies which form so large a part of his written productions. It is not possible for any one in the highest branch of art, literature, to maintain a continuous production of created or independent matter of the highest kind. Criticism therefore becomes as much a necessity as it is a pleasure, not to mention for the moment the natural bent of that phase of culture which Baudelaire represents towards critical and reflective action. Of the two volumes of criticism which have been published under Baudelaire's name, the first, *Curiosités Esthétiques* (a title which is his own, though not actually used by him), is exclusively occupied with the arts of design. The other, *L'Art Romantique*, is more catholic in its comprehension. It includes not merely pictorial and literary but also musical subjects, and of it, the somewhat famous

pamphlet on Wagner's *Tannhäuser* forms part. The characteristics of Baudelaire's picture-criticism are not difficult to discover and describe. It is singularly fluent and pleasant to read, possessing like all his works excellent literary qualities. But on this point it does not stand so very far removed from most French criticism. It has been understood in France, ever since the time of Diderot's matchless *Salons*, that art-criticism must be the work not of a jargonist but of a humanist; and while such criticism has with us generally taken the form either of random comment, directed for the most part to the subject of the picture, or else of odious technicalities, the French have raised it to a not inconsiderable position among literary styles. Baudelaire not unfrequently reminds us of Diderot, and this is of itself high praise. But it is undeniable that his peculiar style of criticism shows its faults (and I cannot agree with Mr Swinburne that it is faultless), more particularly when it is applied to painting. Baudelaire's criticism is not only intensely, but also narrowly and fragmentarily, subjective. With its subjectivity there is no fault to find. There can be nothing better for us, there can be nothing more true to the truth, than that a critic should simply tell us, in the best manner he can, the effect produced on his own mind by a given work of art. But he should at the same time take care to let his mind contemplate the object fully, so that the copy may fairly represent with due difference the phenomenon presented to it. Now Baudelaire is not quite free from the charge of occasionally, indeed not seldom, letting himself go off at a tangent, after very slight contact with a very small portion of the work he has before him. He observes too little and imagines too much, so that his criticism, though it is perhaps in itself more interesting than it would be easy to make

it compatibly with faithful representation, is very often far from representing the complete effect of the subject on his own or any mind. In other words, to read a criticism of Baudelaire's without the title affixed is by no means a sure method of recognising the picture afterwards.

Now as far as painting is concerned, this is without doubt a serious defect. Painting, with its combined attack of colour and form, produces, or ought to produce, a distinct, definite, and uniform effect on the beholder. It is not content with suggestions, it leaves little to the imagination. And it is surely an immutable rule that criticism should in such matters adjust itself to the peculiarities of the thing criticised. Hence it is that Baudelaire is far more successful as a critic when he is dealing with literature and music; arts which, aiming at less minuteness of delineation, leave more to the recipient, and are therefore capable of vaguer and more manifold interpretation. It is natural that Baudelaire, who is nothing if not literary, should incline to this style of criticism, and a curious evidence of his unconscious thoroughness therein is his preference, a preference far more singular in his days than it is now, for etching. For it is in this point that etching differs from kindred arts of design, that it is far more literary and less pictorial; it aims, just as poetry does, rather at calling up in the mind of the beholder an effect similar to something in the mind of the artist, than at the elaborate representation of the artist's own idea. In the recognition of an aim of this sort, Baudelaire is unrivalled among critics; but he does not always escape the imminent danger of this sort of criticism, the danger of seeing in the picture or the poem all sorts of things which are not there, and are not even directly suggested by anything there, but come by a com-

plicated process of association. A critic who should escape this danger while perfecting the style we speak of, who should develop fully but not add to the natural suggestiveness of his subject, and who should not be too hasty or too proud to observe and report as well as interpret, would perhaps be the blue dahlia of his class. It is sufficient praise to say of Baudelaire that his fault, if it be a fault, is only the result of excessive critical sensibility, and so is not far from being a virtue.

He has, moreover, the one merit which is, perhaps more than any other, the mark of the true critic. He judges much more by the form than by the matter of the work submitted to his notice. It is not necessary to indulge in any elaborate reasoning as to the intrinsic excellence of this mode of proceeding. I may content myself with taking a simple and matter-of-fact criterion as to the goodness of the two styles, namely the question "Which is likely to give us the best criticism?" Now it is hardly disputable that, in the case of criticism, the one thing needful (given a sufficient faculty and education) is the absence of prejudice. And it is still less disputable that it is far more difficult for a duly educated critic to err from prejudice, if he be accustomed to approach his subject from the side of form, than if he be wont to consider its matter first. There is a loyalty to art in the mind of every man competent to criticise at all which makes it impossible for him to call good work, as work, bad; or bad work, as work, good. On the other hand attractiveness of matter depends almost entirely on innumerable subtle influences of mood, circumstance, temperament, and habit, against which it is next to impossible to guard. Matter-criticism is particularly untrustworthy where trustworthiness is most to be

desired, in the case of new or exceptional work or workers. Half the critical remarks which have been made for instance on Walt Whitman are vitiated by this defect. The critic has made up his mind that ultra-democratic views are admirable or damnable as the case may be, and all his criticism is tinged by this prepossession. Nor even in the case of less perilous stuff is there any surer way of going wrong than the direction of one's attention to the matter primarily. And against another great danger, the danger of indifference, the study of form is as good a safeguard as it is against the more obvious but not more real danger of prepossession. Many minds, when their possessors are neither very young nor very enthusiastic, come to the conclusion that one thing is as well worth saying or as well worth leaving unsaid as another thing. But no mind of any power or accomplishment can ever come to the conclusion that one manner of saying a thing is as good as another manner.

It must not be supposed that Baudelaire, because he has to the uttermost this artistic feeling, and as a rule conducts his works, both critical and original, in accordance with it, is unaware of the danger attending it, or of the ridicule which it is apt to bring upon any one who allows it to attain exorbitant dimensions. He is in fact remarkable among French authors (against whom it has become almost a commonplace to urge their insensibility to the ludicrous aspects of their particular hobbies and raptures) for the perfect sanity with which he looks at both sides of his own peculiarities, and ridicules himself unsparingly whenever he appears to deserve it, or to be lapsing into the theatrical. So rare is this sanity among the greater French writers, that M. Taine speaks of it quite innocently as a characteristic of the Teutonic race, and if anything rather a

blemish. "Il se moque de ses émotions au moment même où il s'y livre," he says of Heine, and appears to regard this as a somewhat barbarous proceeding, excusable only in a savage who likes bitter ale and "humour." It is quite clear, however, that it is the only safeguard against extravagance and unreality, and that to its presence is owing the unalloyed pathos which distinguishes Heine himself from, let us say, Victor Hugo. This quality Baudelaire possessed in an eminent degree. Almost his first published work, the novelette *La Fanfarlo*, written when he was a very young man, is a satire, elaborate as far as it goes, and in parts very amusing, upon a personage who is none other than the future poet himself, partly as he actually was, and still more as not very acute readers choose to believe that he represented himself. It is curious to compare Samuel Cramer, the *dernier romantique*, who writes poems under the cheerful title of *Les Orfraies*, and at two o'clock in the morning insists on his mistress exchanging the usual dress or undress of that period for the rouge, tinsel, and spangles of the theatre, with the amusing but conventional heroes of Théophile Gautier's *Les Jeune-France*; and the comparison is instructive. It would show, if this were not superfluous, that the author of *Albertus* was only a skin-deep Romantic (being indeed of the class which transcends any special school), whereas the author of *La Fanfarlo* is perhaps the most typical figure in the whole Romantic cycle.

But this is not the only indication of Baudelaire's spirit of compensation. A very remarkable essay, "L'École Païenne," published in 1852, follows suit, and indeed contains better arguments against the author's supposed tendencies than a score of Societies for the Suppression of Vice would be likely to elaborate.

Here, without any trace of irony, the pseudo-Renaissance worship of paganism, the immoderate love of form and art, the disdain of science and philosophy, are all lashed in a manner which is no doubt not unanswerable, but which is far more effective than most of the assaults made on the poet himself, and on those who are in general of the same temper. Meanwhile the paper is interesting, written as it was when many, if not most, of the *Fleurs du Mal* were actually composed, and when the poet was intending to publish them, as a proof of his rare power of looking on the other side. It shows what his sentiments were when he took the purely dramatic view of his favourite subjects and feelings, as in fact he appears very generally to have done; and a passage from it forms an appropriate pendant to the two already cited, as explanatory both of these subjects and feelings, and also of his attitude towards them:

Le goût immodéré de la forme pousse à des désordres monstrueux et inconnus. Absorbées par la passion féroce du beau, du drôle, du joli, du pittoresque, car il y a des degrés, les notions du juste et du vrai disparaissent. La passion frénétique de l'art est un chancre qui dévore le reste: et comme l'absence nette du juste et du vrai dans l'art équivaut à l'absence d'art, l'homme entier s'évanouit; la spécialisation excessive d'une faculté aboutit au néant.

It would be impossible to produce an instance of a mind conceiving and expressing more clearly the dangers of an exaggeration of its own tendencies; it would be impossible also to find any possessing in a fuller degree the rare capacity of seeing all sides of a question. In the critical dicta of such a mind, and in the artistic creations wherein it expresses its ideas, there is a truth and a security which are quite absent from the more apparently moderate utterances of less catholic thinkers.

It is necessary, therefore, for the reader who is to

understand and appreciate fully and fairly the *Fleurs du Mal* and the *Petits Poèmes en Prose*, to bear in mind the idiosyncrasies of the author as to taste and temperament, and to comprehend fully the aim and object of the work. This latter is, in few words, to give poetical expression and currency to the vague joys and sorrows, the faint and fleeting impressions and beliefs, that occupy with more or less obstinacy and continuity the modern cultivated mind. Possessing himself a typical mind of this sort, open to all influences, able to detect all motives, and to analyse whatever strange fancy or feeling may present itself, Baudelaire possesses at the same time a singular faculty of projecting himself out of the circle of his individual tastes and sentiments, and of depicting these at once with the impassive accuracy of an impartial observer and with the sympathetic accuracy of a fellow-sufferer. He is further qualified for the task by the possession of a quite extraordinary spirit of precision and concentration. The curious particulars which M. Asselineau and others give us of his scrupulous attention to the correction of the press are characteristic of his accuracy in other and less mechanical matters. Dealing as he does with a class of subjects in which vague treatment is particularly tempting, and precise treatment peculiarly difficult, he is as accurate in the choice and conduct of his expressions as in the choice and conduct of his verse.

The *Fleurs du Mal* consisted, in the original and suppressed edition, of one hundred poems; in the second, of one hundred and twenty-six; and in the *édition définitive* of 1869, of one hundred and fifty-one, to which must be added a score or so of pieces which the French publishers have been unable or unwilling to insert, but which are easily obtainable in Belgian

editions. No one of these poems exceeds a few pages in length, and the great majority are quatorzains or quartettes of four-line stanzas. The general title, *Fleurs du Mal*, which is said to have been of M. Hippolyte Babou's invention, has several sub-titles, under which the various pieces are grouped. The first of these divisions, which contains by far the greater number of the poems, is entitled "Spleen et Idéal." The pieces included under it go far to present a complete picture of the mind and its wanderings in what may be called the second Romantic stage. The first, of which Byron is the natural representative and spokesman, contented itself, as was indeed natural in a child of the eighteenth century, with simple discontent at the limited capacity of its own stomach. A universe not materially differing from the present save in two points, greater attainability of sweet victuals and a total absence of headache and indigestion, would have exactly met the views of this school. But as La Mettrie produced Diderot, so does Byron produce Baudelaire. The inadequacy of the complaints and desires of the first school was so glaring, that matters could not fail to take the turn which actually followed. The Byronic and Wertherian youth became a highly respectable solicitor or coal-merchant, whose dark imaginings soon limited themselves to a possible crisis in the money market.

Gradually and unequally the second stage in the disorder made its appearance, the great Romantic movement of 1830 being rather a sign of it than its actual embodiment. The Romantic of the second stage suffers from a disorder radically different from the measles incidental to his predecessor. He has not as a rule any very glaring outward symptoms. He does not think it necessary to go to bed at 6 o'clock A.M.,

to drink half-a-dozen of claret, or to wear collars of peculiar cut. He needs not the *έωλοκρασία* of some previous debauch to disgust him with things in general. He has probably satisfied himself tolerably early that there is nothing for which he wishes very much, and that if he had what he may happen to wish for he would not be much the better for it. He has a kind of general aspiration towards the infinite, the vague, the impossible, but he does not go about the streets shouting out these words and his desire for the things they signify. His heart is not worn on his sleeve. Sometimes he takes an interest in things political and religious, and believes in the millennium; but in this case his disease is not incurable, and he is hardly of the purest breed. In art, and above all in literature, he finds a certain solace—a solace which to some natures is all but sufficient. To science he is indifferent, if not absolutely hostile. Of such a mind as this the poems entitled “*Spleen et Idéal*,” miscellaneous as they may appear at first sight, will be found to present a tolerably correct diorama. Of its fits of despondency, or rather of the permanent background which appears whenever no special thought or interest occupies the foreground, of its occasional ecstasies, of the subjects of art or nature which gain its attention, the three following poems may serve as illustrations. Their poetical merit, here as elsewhere, is such as to need no impertinence of superfluous comment. Baudelaire sometimes borrowed his canvases: the work on them is always emphatically his own.

LA CLOCHE FÊLÉE

Il est amer et doux, pendant les nuits d'hiver,
D'écouter, près du feu qui palpite et qui fume,
Les souvenirs lointains lentement s'élever
Au bruit des carillons qui chantent dans la brume.

Bienheureuse la cloche au gosier vigoureux
 Qui, malgré sa vieillesse, alerte et bien portante,
 Jette fidèlement son cri religieux,
 Ainsi qu'un vieux soldat qui veille sous la tente !
 Moi, mon âme est fêlée ; et lorsqu'en ses ennuis
 Elle veut de ses chants peupler l'air froid des nuits,
 Il arrive souvent que sa voix affaiblie
 Semble le râle épais d'un blessé qu'on oublie
 Au bord d'un lac de sang, sous un grand tas de morts,
 Et qui meurt sans bouger, dans d'immenses efforts !

HYMNE

À la très-chère, à la très-belle,
 Qui remplit mon cœur de clarté,
 À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
 Salut en immortalité !
 Elle se répand dans ma vie
 Comme un air imprégné de sel,
 Et dans mon âme inassouvie
 Verse le goût de l'éternel.
 Sachet toujours frais qui parfume
 L'atmosphère d'un cher réduit,
 Encensoir oublié qui fume
 En secret à travers la nuit.
 Comment, amour incorruptible,
 T'exprimer avec vérité ?
 Grain de musc qui gis invisible
 Au fond de mon éternité !
 À la très-bonne, à la très-belle,
 Qui fait ma joie et ma santé,
 À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
 Salut en immortalité !

LA VIE ANTÉRIEURE

J'ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
 Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
 Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
 Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.
 Les houles en roulant les images de cieux,
 Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique
 Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique
 Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.
 C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
 Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
 Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,
 Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
 Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
 Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

These pieces, one hundred and seven in number, and of the utmost diversity in nominal subject, are succeeded by a group closely connected in subject as well as in treatment. "Tableaux Parisiens" are the effect resulting from the action of the large and complicated, yet still in a manner restricted, life of a great city, upon such an imagination as we have already described. There are in the latest edition twenty of them, almost all sombre in character, but of singularly uniform excellence. "Rêve Parisien" and "Les Petites Vieilles" are among the poet's most frequently cited works, and, indeed, few things are more striking than the address to the

Èves octogénaires
Sur qui pèse la griffe effroyable de Dieu,

which drew from Victor Hugo the characteristic remark that Baudelaire "avait créé un frisson nouveau." "Le Vin," which follows, illustrates the same idea as that which we have already noticed in *Les Paradis Artificiels*—the episodes of forgetfulness intercalated in the intervals of spleen by wine and other stimulants. As is usual with Baudelaire, the five pieces which compose this group are of even excellence, but "Le Vin de l'Assassin," the idea of which, as we learn from other sources, the poet had intended to dramatise, deserves special mention. A man has murdered his wife, influenced by a curious medley of feelings, and the poem renders his soliloquy after the deed with a quite unrivalled cunning of interpretation and mastery of expression. But it is in the succeeding division, the *Fleurs du Mal*, properly and specially so called, that the poet's powers show themselves at the fullest.

The group "Révolte," which follows, does not appear to be equally satisfactory. The three pieces of which it is composed, "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre," "Abel

et Cain," and "Les Litanies de Satan," whatever their merits in versification and expression, seem out of place in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The temperament which the poet illustrates does not so much oppose Christianity as ignore it. It is not even the Voltairian "l'infâme," but the general arrangement of the universe which is the object of its aversion, and this aversion is not, as a rule, violently expressed. "Révolte" is, therefore, dramatically a fault, and mars the otherwise admirable composition of the book.

"La Mort" in many of its phases worthily completes the work in a strain of consolation, almost of triumph. In the last poem of all, "Le Voyage," the author, after again describing, now no longer partially, the temper of the minds on which he has turned the glimmer of his lantern, concludes thus:

O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre,
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Appareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noir comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons.

Verse nous ton poison pour qu'il nous reconforte!
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel qu'importe,
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau!

It is not difficult to appreciate the general features of Baudelaire's poetry. The first thing, perhaps, which strikes a careful observer is that it is singularly un-French. The characteristics which one is accustomed to look for in French poetry, even in that which has been most exposed to the denationalising influences of the Romantic movement, are almost entirely absent. The medium of expression is for the first time entirely under the control of the artist. Even Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier, able as they undoubtedly are to say anything, show more traces of the restraining influence of the language than does Baudelaire. Whether this be

owing merely to artistic mastery, or to the absorbing and unprovincial character of the thoughts which he chiefly expresses, it is certain that it exists to a degree which prevents, or long prevented, many Frenchmen from thoroughly admiring the poet. They miss the accustomed turns of thought and expression, the *poncif* from which not even 1830 was able thoroughly to disengage French poetry. Both in reading published criticisms and in conversation, it is usual to find them preferring the least characteristic pieces, poems such as "Don Juan aux Enfers" or "La Géante," which are merely very excellent examples of a style in which fifty Frenchmen have done nearly as well, and two or three better. But the poems quoted above, and many others of equal or superior attractions, which exhibit almost for the first time in French the vague yearnings, aspirations, complaints, and despair to which the English and German languages lend themselves so readily, are far less generally appreciated. The iron of language and prosody has entered into the soul of the average Frenchman to such an extent that he can hardly understand freedom; and this is indeed scarcely to be wondered at by any one who knows what the laws and conditions of French poetry really are. Judicious recurrence to old modes of speech has to a great extent strengthened and supplied the vocabulary, and diligent study of the *Pléiade* has enriched the repertory of metres; but what, after all, is to be done with a language which practically possesses but one foot—the iamb? Let any one take an English poet and see what the result of cancelling almost all his anapæstic and trochaic rhythm would be. The French versifier is in fact very much in the position of a man with one hand tied behind his back, and three fingers of the other hand disabled. Nothing in versification

is more wonderful than the ingenuity with which the great French poets of the century endeavoured to get the better of their restrictions, and managed to produce such lyrics as Victor Hugo's *Chasseur Noir* and Théophile Gautier's *Barcarolle*¹.

But Baudelaire's great peculiarity and excellence is that he manages to produce almost endless variety of metrical and rhythmical effect without having recourse to any mechanical aids of complicated metre and rhythm; by far the larger number of his poems being written in ordinary Alexandrines or eight-syllabled verses arranged in simple four-line stanzas. It is not at all improbable that the superior merit of his Alexandrines is owing to his never having written acted plays; but whatever be the cause of the merit it certainly exists, and his verses stand almost alone in their singular variety of cadence and consequent flexibility of expression. In many of his poems, notably in "Une Martyre," he has managed to stamp such a character of sombre horror on the verse that if syllables of similar sound but unknown sense were substituted, the general effect would still be maintained. It is undoubtedly in the production of this kind of effect, varied and enhanced by touches of quiet beauty, that he chiefly excels, displaying, to apply differently a verse of his own—

Le reflet inattendu d'un bijou rose et noir.

¹ Since their day, and Baudelaire's, efforts have been made not merely to supple the bonds but to destroy them altogether. M. de Banville, the most scholarly of prosodists, reverted in some cases to an archaic disregard of the *cæsura* and of the fixed alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. More recently still M. Verlaine has taken still greater liberties, and the youngest school, yet more greatly daring, have tried to get rid of the value of the mute *e* and to introduce a new prosody altogether. This is, pretty certainly, like all new prosodies, doomed to failure. But it is probable that some of the more artificial rules will be gradually disregarded. See for some further remarks on this head the essay on "The Contrasts of English and French Literature," *infra* (1892).

But original as Baudelaire unquestionably is, he is not any more than others a literary Melchisedec, and I should be inclined to trace the origin of this peculiar manner in part to one of the earlier romantics, Petrus Borel. Petrus has had rather hard measure in one of Baudelaire's critical essays, and in truth his various extravagances, his *bousingotisme* and lycanthropy, were not calculated to attract the younger poet, whose undemonstrativeness and hatred of exaggeration carried him to the other extreme. But Baudelaire has fully acknowledged the excellence of the piece which I have here in view—the preface in verse to *Madame Putiphar*. This poem may be found at length in Asselineau's *Bibliographie Romantique*, and is one of the most remarkable in modern French poetry. It is with considerable difficulty that a reader well acquainted with the *Fleurs du Mal* can bring himself to believe that it is not Baudelaire's own, with a difference. The spirit is the same, the style with its sombre glitter is the same, and the chief point of contrast is the less severe dignity of language and versification.

The resemblance of the *Petits Poèmes en Prose* to the work of another early romantic, Louis Bertrand, though avowed, is less striking. Bertrand's work, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, which a reprint in 1869 has enabled those who wish to study, no doubt suggested to Baudelaire the idea of elaborating short pieces of prose with the unity, precision, and adornment of verse; but the execution of the two is very different, and a consideration of its differences would afford an admirable exercise in criticism. Bertrand seems to have proposed to himself the execution in prose of something similar to those poems which have been among the chief results of 1830, poems exhibiting some definite pictorial subject in a pictorial manner. Accord-

ingly his pieces are all very short, and are divided into staves of about equal length, each of which corresponds to a four-line stanza. The book, even in its reprinted form, being not widely known, I may give as a specimen, not the best but one of the shortest of the pieces:—

L'HEURE DU SABBAT

C'est ici! et déjà, dans l'épaisseur des halliers qu'éclaire à peine l'œil phosphorique du chat sauvage tapi sous les ramées:

Aux flancs des rocs qui trempent dans la nuit des précipices leur chevelure de broussailles ruisselante de rosée et de vers luisants:

Sur le bord du torrent qui jaillit en blanche écume au front des pins, et qui bruine en grise vapeur au front des châteaux:

Une foule se rassemble innombrable, que le vieux bucheron attardé par les sentiers, sa charge de bois sur le dos, entend et ne voit pas.

Et de chêne en chêne, de butte en butte, se répondent mille cris confus, lugubres, effrayants "Hum! hum!—schup! schup!—coucou! coucou!"

C'est ici le gibet! Et voilà paraître dans la bruine un juif qui cherche quelque chose parmi l'herbe mouillée, à l'éclat doré d'une main de gloire.

This book is the very triumph of word-painting, a *tour de force* of the most wonderful kind, executed in most attractive manner, and with matchless felicity and taste, but still a *tour de force*. What is the province of one art is necessarily not the province of another art, and this Baudelaire's finer literary sense enabled him to perceive. There is accordingly in the *Petits Poèmes en Prose* much less of the merely pictorial, and much more appeal to the intellect and the imagination. He has also rejected the division into staves or fragments. Every one of the *Petits Poèmes* is a strictly proper and legitimate piece of prose, in which no ornament or device of an unusual or unprosaic kind is employed. But it is prose employed to serve a new purpose, the presentation of a definite and complete image, thought, or story in a definite, complete, and above all, brief form. The precise presentation within

contracted limits, and the employment of an extraordinarily refined and polished style, are the sole differentiating factors, but the variety and originality which their introduction produces are unmistakable. Such pieces as "Un Hémisphère dans une Chevelure" and "Les Bienfaits de la Lune" show what prose can do, if not to the utmost extent possible, certainly to the utmost extent known to the present writer. Others, as "La Belle Dorothée" and "L'Invitation au Voyage," have an additional interest, because we can compare them with the poet's own treatment of the same subjects in verse. But all, with hardly any exception, display the same extraordinary supremacy of composition and the same mastery over language. Indeed it is not unusual to find persons of no inadequate competence who actually prefer these prose pieces to the author's poetical works, though the preference is probably in some measure due to the curious secret repugnance to French poetry which prevails so largely and to which I have already alluded. But there can be no doubt that the *Petits Poèmes en Prose* are of almost equal merit with the poems proper, and deserve almost equal attention.

The question of the relation of Baudelaire's poetry to morals is one which, were it not forced upon me, I should either not treat at all or pass over very lightly. For by so doing I should best express my most hearty concurrence with those who deprecate entirely the introduction of such questions into matters of literature, and who deny *ab initio* the jurisdiction of the court. For my own part I have little or nothing to add to the arguments which have already been produced on a subject where the argument is on one side and the authority on the other. It is sufficient for me, that the introduction of morality is a *μετάβασις ἐς ἄλλο γένος*,

a blunder and a confusion of the stupidest kind¹. But Baudelaire's position in regard to this matter is so strange that it is impossible to pass it over. The author of a condemned book—condemned under a régime which has justly or unjustly become almost a by-word for the lax morality in conduct and language which it permitted if it did not actually encourage—he has naturally seemed to virtuous men of letters a perfectly safe figure, when they happen to be in need of a vituperative parallel. But if these virtuous persons, in quest (of course only in the pursuit of knowledge) of inspiring indecency, should happen to invest in a copy of the *Fleurs du Mal*, even with the condemned pieces attached, I am afraid they would meet with a disappointment similar to that which Mr Charles Reade described so graphically in *It is Never too Late to Mend*. Indeed, on reading the book it is impossible not to understand and sympathise with the poet's astonishment at the prosecution and its result. The pervading tone, from a moral point of view, is simply a profound and incurable discontent with things in general, a discontent which may possibly be unchristian, but which is not yet an indictable offence in any country that I know of. Among nearly two hundred poems there are barely half-a-dozen the subjects of which come in any way within the scope of that elastic but apparently delicate commandment, infringements of which (or rather incitements to infringements of which) put legislators and moralists so terribly on the *qui-vive*. We all know of course that you may write about murder as often as you like, and no one will

¹ I may be perhaps permitted to try a formula of this endless debate. If any subject can be poetically treated, that subject becomes poetical: if in the eyes of competent judges the treatment is not poetical, either the subject is impossible generally or unachieved in the particular case (1892).

accuse you of having committed that crime. You may depict an interesting brigand without being considered a thief. Nor in either case will you be thought an inciter to either offence. But so soon as you approach the other deadly sin of Luxury in any one of its forms, instantly it appears self-evident that you not only take pleasure in those who do these things but also do them yourself. In Baudelaire's case the immorality is, as Gautier says, "si savante, si abstruse, si enveloppée de formes et de voiles d'art," that it might surely have been regarded as comparatively harmless.

But it may very likely still be asked what the object of the present essay is? Baudelaire, it will be said, even granting his merits, is not a writer likely to be at any time popular, while on the other hand those who are akin to him by their tastes and studies are probably already acquainted more or less with his works. It might be answered that the latter point is at least doubtful, and that even were it not so, the purpose of the writer would place it beside the question. To show the value of Baudelaire's work—a value most certainly still underrated in England, and not even yet always allowed in France—has been the object of this essay, and if this has been in any measure attained I am content. But there is a collateral issue of almost greater importance. It is not merely admiration of Baudelaire which is to be persuaded to English readers, but also imitation of him which is with at least equal earnestness to be urged upon English writers. We have had in England authors in every kind not to be surpassed in genius, but we have always lacked more or less the class of *écrivains artistes*—writers who have recognised the fact that writing is an art, and who have applied themselves with the patient energy of sculptors,

painters, and musicians to the discovery of its secrets. In this literary salt of the earth our soil has not been plentiful, and in a transition epoch, when there is nothing very much to say, the want of care in the manner of saying is especially glaring and painful. In this point France has been far ahead of us for the last fifty years, and it is only of rather late years that much effort has been made on our side. With the usual wastefulness of material affluence we have relied on fulness of thought and natural aptness of language to supply the want of careful and tasteful industry. In poetry this reliance has not altogether failed us. But in prose matters have been far different. A hundred years ago style was not an unknown thing among Englishmen; at the present day it would be easy to count on one hand the living writers who think of anything but of setting down the first words which occur to them as capable of clearly and grammatically expressing their thought¹. That word and phrase are capable of management till they present a result as different from the first crude jotting as a Vandyke from a schoolboy's caricature, seems to be a truth utterly neglected if not utterly forgotten. Nor can we wonder at this if we look at the singular ineptitude in this matter of the average critic. When professional critics tell us that we must admire a certain poet's poems because he recognises the divinity of endurance, that we must not admire such and such an author's translations because his reading has been desultory, that the *Ancient Mariner* is defective as a poem be-

¹ This is not quite true now. But the fingers of one hand will still suffice to count those who, having any thought to express, express it in a style at once individual, adequate, and irreproachable (1892). The efforts in this direction intensified themselves a little later still, the last decade of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century producing many a "demoniaco-seraphic penman's piece of graphic." Unluckily they too were seldom "irreproachable" (1924).

cause it is inconclusive as a plea against cruelty to animals—we can hardly wonder at the attitude of the general public. That attitude was formulated once for all in the phrase “I must take pleasure in the thing represented before I take pleasure in the representation.” Or, as it was said of old time to one expatiating on the beauties of Flameng’s etching after Herrera, *L’Enfant à la Guitare*, “I wonder you like that. *I thought you hated babies.*” That any one should care for form apart from subject was incomprehensible.

To remove as much as possible this incomprehensibility by precept and example, in criticism as well as in original work, is the business as it seems to me of all English artists, and of the English prose writer especially, inasmuch as his own art is in worse case than any. If in matter of prose style “*nous avons perdu le chemin de Paros*,” it must be rediscovered. To the end that this may be done I know nothing more important than the study of those authors, in prose and verse, who have been most careful and most successful in like attempts before us, and of such authors I know none more suitable to the purpose than Baudelaire. His work measured by volume is not great. But in that work there is no line of careless or thoughtless execution, no paragraph where taste or principle has been sacrificed for praise or pay, for fear or favour, no page where the humanist and literary ideal is not steadily kept in view and exemplified. Valuable and delightful as he is for private study with no further end, he should be yet more valuable and productive of multiplied delight as a model and a stimulant. It was once reported of a scholar not unknown at one of our universities, that before going to bed he invariably, in conscious or unconscious extension of ancient habits,

read a sonnet of Shakespeare. If this practice should spread, and manuals of profane devotion become common among men of letters, I know none that I should be tempted to adopt myself, and to recommend to others, in preference to the writings of Charles Baudelaire.

II

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT¹ [1878]

IN a letter to Sainte-Beuve, expostulating with the great critic for his judgment on *Salammbô*, the author asks the judge, "Êtes-vous bien sûr d'abord de n'avoir pas obéi un peu trop à votre impression nerveuse? L'objet de mon livre vous déplaît *en soi*." Perhaps Flaubert, having been early put on his defence by the prosecution of *Madame Bovary*, was a little too prone to be piqued at criticism. But it is hardly doubtful that the feeling which, as he thinks, prejudiced even Sainte-Beuve, is one against which the critical reader of his books has to be decidedly on his guard. Both *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô* are very apt to produce the unfavourable nervous impression of which he speaks; *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, with its unbroken presentment of meanness, feebleness, irresolution, vice without glamour, and virtue without charm, is open to the same charge; and though I myself consider *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* attractive in the very highest degree, I do not know that this is a general opinion. Of the three short stories published later *La Légende de Saint Julien* is, I should think, beyond reproach, and *Un Cœur Simple* almost equally so; but *Hérodiade* is, in defects as well as merits, almost a replica on a small scale of *Salammbô*. The posthumous and uncompleted *Bouvard et Pécuchet* never received a final passing through the alembic from its author, and it is not certain that even he could ever have effected that operation. But as it is, the most ardent Flaubertist of intelligence must acknowledge that it is

¹ Revised and added to in 1890. See also note at end of this.

rudis indigestaque moles; and that the “vanity of vanities” of its survey of almost all possible literary, scientific, and practical occupations is not only depressing in the highest degree, but almost unrelieved by the satire of the earlier work. Thus it happens that the reader of this very singular novelist has to win his pleasure at the cost of a considerable effort. Like Saint Julian himself, he has to endure repulsiveness in order to gain the subsequent charm, and even when that charm is gained it is, perhaps, rather the charm of exquisite literature than that of perfect fiction.

One thing that distinguishes Flaubert in these days of easy writing is his determined and conscientious patience of workmanship. The short list of books I have already given represents—if we add the unimportant comedy *Le Candidat*—the whole of his published work, excepting letters, and yet from the first appearance of fragments of the *Tentation* to his death was more than thirty years. Even Thackeray’s allowance of two years for the writing of a good novel sinks into insignificance beside this almost Horatian reticence. Flaubert, a man of sixty when he died, had in his lifetime produced about twice as much as one of our quarterly novelists accomplishes in a twelvemonth; but then Flaubert’s work is work which a man may be proud of at the close of a lifetime spent upon it, and the quarterly novelist’s work is work which, if it cost as many minutes as it has hours, would still have deserved the Æschylean verdict—

μόχθος περισσὸς κουφόνους τ’ εὐηθία.

It has sometimes been thought—in my judgment erroneously—that much of the character of Flaubert’s work was determined by the prosecution of his first book. I believe there is now no difference of opinion

about the injustice as well as the unwisdom of that prosecution. *Madame Bovary* is, I frankly admit, a repulsive book in more ways than one; but I should as soon think of calling a Dance of Death or a Last Judgment immoral, as of applying that epithet to it. An American critic—Mr Henry James—has pleasantly suggested that it might make a useful Sunday School tract, and Mr James is a person who is (or was) wont to speak with all the sternness of New England concerning any transgression of the proprieties. But I do not think that the author was at all induced by the fate of this first book to aim at topping his part in the effort to obtain successes of scandal. It has always struck me that the outcry over *Salammbô* arose mainly from the determination of the public to be shocked, and its disappointment at finding nothing to shock it. As for *L'Éducation Sentimentale*—in 1840 or thereabouts it would have been entitled *Physiologie de l'Homme Manqué*—there is little enough to scandalise anybody in that vast treasure of pitiless observation, and the *Trois Contes* contains next to nothing that can be called bravado. Scarcely so much can be said of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, but of that later. Flaubert, before the abundant personal revelations which followed his death, gave me the impression of a man of saturnine temperament, who happened to combine in very unusual measure the observing with the imagining faculty, and who probably developed himself with hardly any reference to the opinion of the public or the critics about his successive developments. Nor have those revelations altered my opinion. His work is all worthy of attention, and its extent, fortunately, enables me to give some detailed notice of all of it here.

It is a peculiarity of Flaubert that he was not merely a little-writing but a late-writing novelist. Some

fragments of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, which was not to be published in its entirety till long afterwards, appeared in *L'Artiste* at the time when Gautier edited it, more than twenty years earlier. But *Madame Bovary* was not given to the world until its author had passed the half-way house of his threescore years and ten. It appeared at first in the *Revue de Paris*, and in this publication some unwise omissions were made, notwithstanding the author's protest. Omissions have the force of asterisks—they are simply provocatives to the prurient; and *Madame Bovary* found itself greeted with a “*fié! fié!*” almost before it was in the hands of the public. Now it so happened that the Second Empire was just at this time very anxious to justify its famous boasts as to the glorification of religion and the guardianship of the family. *Madame Bovary* was thought to be a proper object of its holy zeal, and was prosecuted accordingly. The proceedings are appended to the later editions of the book. M. Flaubert was luckier than Baudelaire, for he escaped with a gentle censure. An incident of this kind influences the future of a book in the eyes of almost all readers, and of all critics but a very few. But I need say no more about it, except to reiterate what I have already said, that the prosecution is now defended by nobody. The second title is *Mœurs de Province*, and the two between them describe, more accurately than is the wont of titles, the contents. On the one side it is an analytical description of a new Harlot's Progress; the history of the fall and punishment of a woman who happens to unite strong aspirations after luxury, in both senses of the word, with a superficial sensibility, an utter heartlessness, and an incurable vulgarity of mind. On the other it is a minute account from the outside of the pettinesses of provincial life, recounted not ill-

naturedly or satirically, for Flaubert is the most impersonal and passionless of writers, but with fidelity and indifference, which are quite as ruthless as any satire.

Emma Rouault is the daughter of a farmer of the Pays de Caux in Normandy, who is a widower. He is able to live in a kind of sluttish plenty, and withal to have his daughter educated at a convent. Here she acquires a reasonable measure of accomplishments and a still greater measure of sensibility in its eighteenth-century meaning. She reads endless romances and keepsakes, and dreams the usual dreams of girlhood, except that her dreams are apt to concentrate themselves much more upon Prince Charming's pomp and magnificence than upon his personal characteristics. At last her father takes her to the farm, and she subsides for a time into the uncongenial occupations of the housewife. All things considered, it is of course natural that she should marry the first man that asks her, and it so happens that her father, who is in no position to furnish her with a good *dot*, is not at all inclined to make any objections. The suitor is, as fate will have it, the doctor of the district, one Charles Bovary. He is a young man and not bad-looking, but hopelessly commonplace and uninteresting, with barely brains enough to enable him to scrape through his examinations and start himself as a general practitioner. He has already been once married, young as he is; for his mother, who altogether disposes of him, has chosen him a wife as she has chosen him a profession. But this wife is dead, and he now, having been thrown by chance in Emma's way, thinks of choosing for himself. They are married, and the description of the wedding guests is an early example of Flaubert's peculiar style and power.

Then Emma goes to live with the most honest, most

affectionate, and most stupid of men, whose delicacy is pretty well gauged by his leaving the withered wedding bouquet of his dead wife to greet her successor as an ornament of the conjugal chamber. He is on his part more than satisfied with his bargain, and enjoys the same sort of quiet animal felicity as that which possesses a ruminating cow. With Emma, as it may be supposed, things are different. She has married in expectation of all the mysterious delights of which her romances have told her, and as she altogether fails to experience them, she is at first a good deal puzzled. Of such puzzlement there can be only one end, and she gradually begins to hate her husband, to watch with a sort of fascinated aversion his unrefined ways, his slovenly habits, his stupid and commonplace remarks. She is absolutely without society. Her home is in that marvel of dreary untidiness, an average French village, and she is one of those women who are always dull without excitement. The climax is put to it all by a casual visit to a neighbouring château, whither the pair are invited with a view to electioneering matters. The dinner, the ball, the costly furniture, the viscounts and dukes, the champagne, and the Persic apparatus generally, are too much for Emma. Her merely passive dulness changes to an active rage because she has not all these things which the great ladies have; and happening to pick up an embroidered cigar-case which one of the visitors has dropped, she preserves it as a kind of fetish, a relic of the luxury and excitement from which she is debarred.

At last she becomes seriously ill, and Bovary, who adores her in his stupid way, is prevailed upon to remove from Tostes, where they have been living, and where he has got together a fair practice, to Yonville, in another district, a larger place and within reach of

Rouen. Here Madame Bovary's moral malady is not long in coming to a crisis. A neighbouring squireen, a coarse brute enough, whom she takes for a model cavalier, soon perceives that the pear is ripe, and at his first touch it drops. For a time Emma persuades herself that she is happy, and indulges in the wildest eccentricities in order to build up her romance. She is gradually disenchanted, and at last, trying to lash herself into fresh excitement, she suggests elopement. But Rodolphe, the lover, has not the least intention of saddling himself with such a burden.

The revulsion is, of course, violent, and the usual devotional reaction sets in. But the excellent country priest to whom she has before her transgression tried to explain her spiritual state, is as unwilling and as unable to play the part of spiritual healer as an old-fashioned English parson, and cannot for the life of him make out her drift. "If she is ill at ease," he had asked her at her first confidence, "why doesn't she ask her husband to prescribe for her?" So Emma is not long in returning to her first works. A lawyer's clerk, with whom she had a platonic flirtation before the days of Rodolphe, reappears, and a second liaison is entered upon as rashly as the first, and carried on almost more shamelessly. All this time she has been as extravagant as she has been unfaithful. A cunning village tradesman has got her completely in his clutches. She has obtained from her foolish husband a power of attorney, and has signed bill after bill, until the whole amount is, to her, immense. Payment is suddenly demanded. She tries her old lover in vain; her new one, frightened at the proposals she makes to him that he shall embezzle the money, leaves her, and she is equally unsuccessful with the people she knows in Yonville, though she descends to the lowest means of persuasion.

At last in despair she poisons herself with arsenic, and expires in horrible torments. Her husband is totally ruined, but this is nothing in his eyes compared with the loss of her. He neglects his practice, sinks into poverty, and only when he is utterly broken down discovers her treachery by chance. This is the last blow, and he dies of a broken heart, while the one child of the miserable pair becomes a factory-hand.

I never myself read *Madame Bovary* without thinking of another masterpiece of French fiction; and I have no doubt that the comparison has occurred to others also. *Madame Bovary* and *Manon Lescaut* are both histories of women whose conduct no theory of morality, however lax, can possibly excuse. Both are brought to ruin by their love of material luxury. Both are not only immoral, but cruelly unfaithful to men who in different ways are perfectly true and faithful to them. Both perish miserably, not in either case without repentance. Why does Emma Bovary repel while Manon Lescaut irresistibly attracts us? I think the answer is to be found in the ignoble character of the former as compared with Manon. The mistress of Desgrieux loves wealth, splendour, sensuous gratification of all sorts, for themselves, with a kind of artistic passion. They are the first necessity to her, and everything else comes second to this passionate devotion. On the other hand, Madame Bovary sets up lovers, spends her husband's money, cheats and deceives him, because it seems to her the proper thing to do. Her countesses and duchesses all had lovers and gorgeous garments, so she must have gorgeous garments and lovers too. Her first reflection after transgressing is almost comic—"J'ai un amant!" She has a sort of Dogberry-like conviction that a pretty woman ought to have a lover and everything handsome about her, the same sort of

conviction which more harmlessly leads her English sisters to be miserable if they have not a drawing-room with a couch and chairs, and a chimney-glass, and gilt books on the table. Her excesses come from a variety of feminine snobbery, and are not prompted by any frank passion or desire.

The reproach usually brought against the book is that it is too dreary, and that there is not a sufficient contrast of goodness and good humour to relieve the sombre hue of the picture. I believe myself that the author felt this, and that he intended to supply such a contrast in the person of M. Homais, the apothecary of Yonville. It has been suggested that Homais is not intended to be favourably drawn, but I think that this is a mistake. Homais has indeed the slight touch of charlatanism which half-educated and naturally shrewd men, whose lot is cast among people wholly uneducated and mostly stupid, often acquire. But he is an unconscious humbug, and not a bad fellow as the world goes, besides being intensely amusing. Much of the amusement, indeed, results from the impassibly saturnine way in which Flaubert directs even the gambols of his puppets. This impassibility is the great feature, as I have said, of all his books, and notably of this. The stupid commonplaceness of Charles Bovary's youth, the sordid dulness of his earlier married life, the more graceful dulness of the second, the humours of a county gathering and agricultural show at Yonville, the two liaisons with the vulgar *roué* squire and the dapper lawyer's clerk, the steps of Emma's financial entanglement, the clumsy operation by which Bovary attempts to cure a clubfoot, the horrors of the heroine's deathbed, and the quieter misery of her husband's end, are all told with the material accuracy of a photograph and the artistic

accuracy of a great picture. As a specimen of the style I may quote the passage in which Emma's first conscious awakening to her mistake in marrying Bovary is described:—

She began by gazing all round to see if nothing had changed since her last visit. The foxgloves and the wallflowers were in the same places, the clumps of nettles still surrounded the great stones, and the blotches of lichen still stretched across the windows, whose closed shutters on their rusty hinges were slowly mouldering themselves away. Her thoughts, at first of no precise character, flitted hither and thither like the greyhound which ran round in circles, barked at the butterflies, hunted the field-mice, or nibbled the corn-flowers at the edge of the wheat. Little by little her ideas grew more definite; and as she sat on the grass and dug her parasol here and there into the turf, she kept repeating to herself, "Why did I marry him?" She asked herself whether she might not by some other chance have fallen in with some other husband, and she tried to imagine what these events which had not happened, this life which had never existed, this husband whom she did not know, would have been like. All men surely were not like Charles. He might have been handsome, witty, gentlemanly, attractive, like the husbands whom her old schoolfellows no doubt had married. What were they doing now? In Paris, amid the bustle of the streets, the excitement of the theatres, the brilliance of the balls, they were living lives where the heart had room to expand and the senses to develop. But as for her, her life was as cold as a garret that looks to the north, and ennui like a spider spun its web in the shadow of the corners of her heart. She thought of the prize days at the convent, when she had to go up to the platform to take her crown. With her long hair, her white dress, and her kid shoes, she must have looked pretty doubtless, for the gentlemen as she passed to her place leant over to pay her compliments. The courtyard was full of carriages, good-byes were sounding from the windows, and the music-master bowed as he passed with his violin case under his arm. How far off it all seemed!

One might multiply passages of this sort almost indefinitely, but one more extract must suffice. For my own part I do not know where to find a greater masterpiece of ironical contrast than the following pair of pictures. The wife, in the heyday of her passion for Rodolphe, has recovered all, and more than all, her spirit and good looks; she already dreams of an elopement and of the stock scenery and joys of her novels

and her books of beauty. The husband dreams too—of a happy future, when his daughter shall have her mother's charms—

When in the middle of the night he returned from a visit to his patients, he did not dare to wake her. The shade of the night-light threw a circular flicker on the ceiling, and the closed curtains of the little cradle looked like a white tent in the shadow by the side of the bed. Charles gazed at both, and listened to the light breathing of the child. She would soon grow big; every change of the seasons would bring a change on her. He saw her in fancy coming home from school at evening, smiling, with her sleeves stained with ink and her basket on her arm. She would have to go to boarding-school, and that would be expensive. How should they manage? Then he began to plan. He would take a little farm in the neighbourhood, and manage it himself, visiting it on the way to visit his patients. He would save the proceeds and lay them up in the savings-bank. Then he would invest the sum, no matter how. Besides, his practice would increase. It must, for he had made up his mind that Bertha should be well brought up, that she should be clever, that she should play on the piano. How pretty she would be in fifteen or sixteen years, when she would wear straw bonnets like her mother's in summer, and they would be taken for a pair of sisters! He fancied her working in the evening by their side under the lamplight, embroidering slippers, managing the house, and filling it with her gracious ways and her cheerfulness. Then they would take care to settle her well; they would find some honest fellow with a good livelihood; they would make her happy for ever.

Madame Bovary's dreams are somewhat different:—

Behind four horses at full speed she had been travelling for a week to some new country, never to return. From the mountain brow they saw some splendid city with domes, ships, bridges, forests of orange trees, and cathedrals of white marble, with storks' nests in their slender pinnacles. Bells sounded, mules whinnied, the guitars played, and the fountains plashed, while their spray as it floated cooled piles of fruit heaped pyramid-wise at the foot of smiling statues. Then one day they came to a fishing-village, whose brown nets were drying on the shore beside the huts. There they would stay and live in a low house with flat roofs, shaded by a palm tree, at the bottom of a gulf on the edge of the sea. They would sail in gondolas, swing in hammocks: their life should be as soft and as easy as their silken garments, as passionate and starry as the nights at which they would gaze.

The contrast between these aspirations is only less striking than the contrast of the actual tomorrows

which light both these fools on their way to dusty death. For the domestic happiness which Bovary forecasts, come shame, ruin, and misery; for the dissolving-view and opera-scenery delights which Emma promises herself, come cheap debauchery, insult, persecution, cowardly desertion, hideous suffering. There is no fault in the composition of the picture; every line tells, every line would be missed if it were away. Perhaps there is some unnecessary exaggeration in the loathsomeness, if not in the horror, of the deathbed. Lamartine, who was a sentimental person, is said to have objected to this deathbed because it seemed to him that, heavy as were Emma's crimes, her punishment was heavier still. I do not agree with this, and I do not miss or question the powerful relief which the details give when one remembers the sybaritic tastes and the horror of the disagreeable which characterised the victim. But I am not sure—falling in to this extent with the tract theory—that M. Flaubert was not reprehensibly influenced in this particular by a desire to point a moral; and if this be the case it is certainly a painful instance of a lapse into the heresy of instruction on the part of a faithful servant of art.

Few greater contrasts can be found in fiction than the subject of Flaubert's first book and the subject of his second. Five years after *Madame Bovary* appeared *Salammbô*. From the dullest and flattest modernness the author had shifted to remote antiquity—to the nation of which less is known than of any other civilised nation, and which has to us the strangest and most unfamiliar characteristics and history. *Salammbô* is a Carthaginian story, the history of Hannibal's sister. Before writing it, Flaubert visited Carthage, and saw that of the ancient city there was nothing to be seen. He sought out with laborious erudition all

the scattered fragments of historical information that yet exist respecting the city of Dido and Sophonisba, and discovered that there was little to be learnt. All his scanty information he has woven into the narrative, supplementing it with the results of his vivid imagination and his endless patience. The merits of the book were violently contested, and on the whole its reception was scarcely favourable. I have already indicated what seems to me to have been one at least of the causes of dissatisfaction. It had been impressed on the public that M. Flaubert was improper, and the expected impropriety was not sufficiently discoverable, indeed a good deal had been cut out. From this came disappointment, which, if not respectable, was, perhaps, according to the ways of this world, only to be expected. Furthermore, there can be little doubt that the barbaric scenery and the shadowy characters were not relished. It was said by an acrid critic that Salammbô might or might not be Carthaginian, but that she was not human; and though the retort, that if it had been otherwise the critic would have said that she might be human but was not Carthaginian, was witty, it was hardly valid. Lastly, it must be admitted that the indulgence in repulsive detail, which is one of the author's undoubted faults, is here rather painfully marked. The book is full of blood and torture, and, perhaps, this is justifiable enough by what we know of Carthage and Carthaginian institutions. But the way in which the leprosy of the suffete Hanno pursues us through it, is surely gratuitous.

The story opens at the close of the first Punic war. The mercenaries have already begun to clamour for their pay, and the senate, half to appease them, half to spite the absent Hamilcar Barca, have appointed his gardens as the scene of a great banquet to the

army. Wine leads to riot, and the gardens are ravaged by the drunken throng, who, however, refrain from injuring the house or insulting Salammbô. The soldiers are cajoled into leaving Carthage, but faith is not kept with them, and they at last break out into open mutiny under their historical leaders Spendius and Matho—the latter a Libyan, who has conceived a mad passion for the heroine. The mercenaries besiege Carthage, and it occurs to Spendius, a freethinking half-caste of Magna Græcia, to attempt to carry off the mantle of the goddess Tanit, the sacred Zaimph, the talisman of Carthage. He and Matho penetrate into the city by an aqueduct and achieve their object—the narrative of the capture of the Zaimph being a miracle of description. But Matho cannot bring himself to leave the city without trying the effect of his prize on Salammbô, who is known to be a frantic devotee of the goddess, and he nearly falls into the hands of his enemies in consequence. Then the mercenaries retire to Utica, and the suffete Hanno is sent to chastise them. He is at first successful, but is finally defeated with horrible carnage, and just at this crisis Hamilcar comes home. After a violent debate in the senate full powers are given him, but the forces at his disposal are too small, and he can effect hardly anything against the mercenaries. Salammbô is therefore stirred up by her father-confessor (to give old things new names) to attempt the recovery of the Zaimph. This, after a mysterious incantation scene with a tame python, she endeavours to do, and she succeeds by her blandishments in carrying it off from Matho's tent. But the effect is not miraculous. The mercenaries still prosper, and the popular fanaticism shifts from the milder goddess Tanit to the terrible Moloch. One of the *auto-da-fés* common at Carthage is resolved on, and Hannibal

himself only escapes the fire by his father's artifice. The citizens gather courage, the Numidian prince, Narr' Havas, who has hitherto supported the mutineers, deserts them for love of Salammbô, and Carthage at last triumphs, her rebellious soldiery perishing almost to a man by a horrible mixture of force and treachery. Matho alone is reserved for the sport of the capital, and dies at Salammbô's feet after running the gauntlet of hideous torture through the streets. Almost instantly she herself dies, as she pledges the genius of Carthage, "for that she had touched the mantle of Tanit."

I do not know a more difficult book to judge than *Salammbô*. At the first reading—at least this was my own experience when about the time of its publication I first read it—its absence of human interest, its profusion of hideous details, its barbaric and unreal world, where the figures seem half shadows, and the scenery and properties leave a confused impression of gold and blood, of gorgeousness and horror, on the mind, it is difficult to avoid experiencing that nervous impression of which its author speaks. But at every successive reading this disappears. The enormous genius which can thus reconstruct—or invent, if you will—a world so different from the world we know, yet coherent, consistent, possible even, and tallying well with the few known facts of the matter; the absolutely unsurpassed excellence of the descriptions, which have the matter-of-fact exactitude that Macaulay was pleased to laugh at in Dante; the power and art of the thing, in short, grow on one strangely. To read *Salammbô* has an effect something like the described effect of haschisch or opium without the unpleasant after-results; and it may be added that each successive exhibition of the drug is more potent and less deleterious than the earlier

experiences, a characteristic not common in artificial paradises. We grow accustomed to the grisly gorgeous world in which we find ourselves, the painting of God's judgments in purple and crimson becomes as natural as it was in a certain Hollow City, and the cruelty and the vigour, the hideous diseases and the terrible worship of the Semite, cease to affect us other than dramatically. If *Salammbô* is colourless, we remember that Jephtha's daughter owes most of her colour to the "Dream of Fair Women." If Hamilcar is treacherous and cruel, it occurs to us that some casuistry has been expended on the performances of Jacob and David. If Hanno is a leper, what was Naaman? But for all this I do not know that *Salammbô* is to be recommended for general reading. It is altogether an esoteric book requiring initiation, training, preliminary ceremonies and efforts. Now the novel-reader, not unjustly, is little inclined to comply with such a demand. He prefers that his books should please him at the first reading, not at the second, third, or tenth.

Another long interval—seven years—passed, and Flaubert once more presented himself. This time his burden was again of an entirely different nature. *Salammbô* is hardly more different from *Madame Bovary* than *L'Éducation Sentimentale* is from both. There are here no horrors, no splendours, no unfamiliar scenery, no hazardous description. I have already suggested an alternative title for the book, and of such alternatives very moderate ingenuity might supply half a dozen. It is an encyclopædic sort of novel, and goes some way towards being a whole *Comédie Humaine* of failure in two volumes. But Flaubert's critics were equal to the occasion. M. de Pontmartin had informed him that *Salammbô* might be Carthaginian, but was not human. M. Saint-René Taillandier now informed him

that Frederic Moreau might be human, but was unreadably dull. Dulness, indeed, is a favourite charge against *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, and one criticism I have read of it pronounces it full of all sorts of admirable things, but "dead," "sawdust and ashes." Let us see what it is really like.

We are introduced to the hero on board a Seine steamboat which is taking him home at the end of his college days,—college rather in the French and older Scotch, than in the English sense. He meets on board the boat an affable gentleman, one M. Jacques Arnoux, with whose wife Frederic Moreau instantly falls in love, as in 1840 a young gentleman of eighteen years old was bound to do, considering that the lady had black hair and an olive skin, and was therefore strictly *comme il faut* in the romantic sense. Before he leaves the boat, the affable Arnoux invites him to go and see them in Paris, whither he is soon to return to study law, and he reaches his mother's house convinced of a great passion. As soon as he returns to the capital he makes his call, uselessly at first, but afterwards with better success. Arnoux is the editor of an art journal, and his office is the regular lounging place of a large floating circle of artists, men of letters, amateur politicians, and the like, with most of whom Frederic soon makes acquaintance. He is also, after some little time, made free of the drawing-room as well as the office, and finds Madame Arnoux as charming as he had thought her, but altogether free from coquetry, indeed a model wife and mother, while he himself is much too young and too diffident to lay violent siege to her. His acquaintance, moreover, is not confined to this clique. He makes friends up to a certain point with many of his fellow-students. He has introductions to a M. Dambreuse, a provincial *seigneur* who has amalgamated his

de and taken to financing. After a time, too, his school crony, Deslauriers, comes up to Paris and keeps house with him.

But he does not take kindly to the study of the law, and he does not find that his friends and the amusements of Paris give him much pleasure. He discovers, while at home on a visit, that he is much poorer than he thought, and this makes a very disagreeable change in his ideas, the only consolation he has being the small auburn-haired daughter of a rich country neighbour, to whom he reads much romantic literature, and who is immensely fond of him. Suddenly an old uncle dies and leaves him twelve hundred a year. He of course returns to Paris, expecting to lead a perfectly happy life. He renews his old friendships and makes new ones, some of them not of the most edifying description, for Arnoux introduces him to a certain Mademoiselle Rosanette, with whom Frederic in his lazy, irresolute manner proceeds also to fall in love, though he never ceases to regard Madame Arnoux with the old timid adoration. Thenceforward the book is a chronicle of the history of all these persons, and of many others whom we have not mentioned. The central figure is still Frederic and his irresolute philanderings with Madame Arnoux, Rosanette, the auburn Louise Roque, and Madame Dambreuse, who at last admits him as *amant en titre*, and after her husband's death wishes to marry him. He is always going to do something, but never does it, and his usual mental attitude is typically represented in a scene where he is on the point of indulging his tender emotions, but reflects that "somebody may come," and so doesn't.

There is not a character of the scores which figure in the book that is not in itself a masterpiece. The feminine but somewhat colourless virtues of Madame

Arnoux, the amiable vulgarity and matter-of-fact caprice of Rosanette, the calculating coldness of Madame Dambreuse, the feather-headed oddities of Arnoux, who really loves his wife while he is ruining himself on her rival, and who loves art too much to make profit, and profit too much to be an artist, the slangy romanticism of the journalist Hussonet, the crazes of the dauber Pellerin, the amateur politician Regimbart, the honest clerk Dussardier, the fatuous aristocrat De Cisy, the model man Martinon, who "always presents himself in three-quarter profile, and looks as neat as a piece of Sèvres china," the vulgar lawyer Deslauriers—are all admirable. But most admirable of all is Frederic himself, good-hearted, not destitute of talent and culture, but unstable as water, given to look at all sides of a question, and so to take none, and subjected to all sorts of humiliations and disappointments at the hands of men less gifted in every way than himself. Nor is the scenery worthy of less praise. The interiors throughout are perfect. The descriptions of a visit to the Alhambra—in the Champs Elysées, not in Granada—of the fancy ball in Rosanette's apartments, and, above all, of the revolution of 1848, of which Frederic is in his external way a spectator, yield to few things of the kind. But the greatest attraction of the book is the profusion of observation and knowledge of the intricacies of action and conduct which it displays, and which I do not hesitate to say is not excelled in the work of any contemporary writer.

To what, then, are we to attribute the comparative unpopularity of the book, which in some ten years passed through but four editions, while work far inferior could count reappearances by fifties? I can only recur to my original explanation—the explanation

suggested by the author himself—that of an unpleasant nervous impression. The reader of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* does actually journey from Dan to Beersheba, and finds that all is barren. The book comes to no particular end, but years and years after its active story ceases Frederic meets first his early love, Madame Arnoux, and then his early friend, Deslauriers. Madame Arnoux comes nominally to restore to him a sum of money which he has long ago lent her husband, but really to make a tacit confession of that regret respecting which Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and a good many other people have wondered whether it is not worse than remorse. Deslauriers and Moreau, as they review their lives, decide that the mere schoolboy follies of their early youth are perhaps the happiest times they have known, and so the curtain falls on a “set gray life and apathetic end.”

Now the novel-reader does not like this. He probably knows in his secret heart that this setness and apathy are the actual end of an enormous number of lives. But he is not accustomed to have the fact thus sharply brought before him. The accepted laws of novel-writing require a *dénouement*, tragic it may be, arbitrary and insufficient it may be, even to the extent of the traditional marriage bells, but still a *dénouement* of some sort. The passionless review of folly and weakness which *L'Éducation Sentimentale* contains is too cold-blooded for most people to accept. They would rather have downright satire, even of the red-hot brand of Swift, than this cool depicting of failure and impotence. To a certain extent no doubt this is a question of taste and not arguable; to a certain extent, also, it is one proper to be argued, but not to be argued here. I should only say that to me it appears that Flaubert's process is a perfectly allowable one, and

that the result certainly gives *me* pleasure. If the last remark should appear egotistical, I can only say in excuse that I know no other test of the pleasure-giving properties of a novel, or for that matter of anything else, than its effects on oneself.

Five years again passed, and then appeared *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, a republication in part, and scarcely in strictness to be called a novel, but far too remarkable to be passed over here. It is in semi-dramatic form, the descriptions and scenery being given in the form of stage direction. For his details Flaubert has ransacked all the pictures of Breughel, Teniers, Callot, De Blès, and a score of others, not to mention written fancies, and has added thereto, as usual, very much of his own. The book opens thus:—

The scene is in the Thebaid on the heights of a mountain, where a platform of semicircular shape is surrounded with great stones. The hermit's cell occupies the background. It is built of mud and reeds, is flat-roofed and doorless. Inside are seen a pitcher and some black bread; in the centre on a wooden stand a large book; on the ground, here and there, split rushes, a mat or two, a basket, and a knife. Half a dozen paces from the cell there is a tall cross planted in the ground, and at the other end of the platform a gnarled old palm-tree leans over the abyss, for the side of the mountain is scarped. At the bottom of the cliff the Nile spreads like a lake. To right and left the view is bounded by the rocks, but on the side of the desert immense undulations of a yellowish ash colour rise, one above and beyond the other, like the lines of a beach, and far off beyond the sands the mountains of the Libyan range form a chalklike wall shaded with violet haze. In front the sun is setting. To the north the sky is of a gray colour. But towards the zenith purple clouds like flakes of hair stretch over the blue vault. These flakes grow browner, the gray paleness spreads over the bluer patches, the bushes, the pebbles, the earth become of a hard bronze tint, and through space there floats a fine gold-coloured powder, hardly distinguishable from the vibrations of the light.

The saint begins to meditate over his past life. As he recounts it a feeling of bitterness comes over him. His lot as anchorite is so hard and then so useless. Would he not have done better to have used his talents

in some worldly employment, and to have lived virtuously but in moderate comfort? While he muses thus and grows more and more discontented with his fate, strange things begin to happen. Shadows flit about; voices are heard. At last, when, hungry and thirsty, he finds that his water-jug is empty and that the jackals have stolen his last crust, the temptation becomes definite. A mighty table with all sorts of cates arises before him. But he resists this, and all is once more dark. His foot strikes a cup; it contains money—first small silver pieces, then gold. His thoughts go on gradually. With the first piece of money he can buy a sheepskin—even an anchorite may have a sheepskin. Then the ideas of avarice grow for a moment; he has almost succumbed, and, thinking with a shudder how near he has been to mortal sin, he is on the point of despair. Suddenly a vision seizes him; he is transported to the capital, is made the emperor's first favourite—his minister—emperor himself even; then from Constantine he becomes in fancy Nebuchadnezzar, and revels and is degraded like the great king. But this vision, too, passes, only to be followed by others. The Queen of Sheba comes, fantastically attended, to offer herself to him.

When she has departed, his old disciple, Hilarion, appears. He discusses theology and ecclesiastical affairs with Antony, hints evil things of the great bishops of the day, points out discrepancies in the gospels, all in a kind of tentative way, till the saint is puzzled and weary. Once more he is transported to a vast temple or series of temples where all the myriad heresies and fanaticisms of Eastern Christianity are represented. The Gnostic, the Manichæan, the Marcionite, assault him in turns; Valentinus lectures him on the pleroma; the feminine devotees of Montanus wrangle as to their

master's affection for them; the lower Gnostic sects celebrate orgies of all sorts in his presence. Then he is wafted into the prisons of the Christian martyrs and the cemeteries where they are buried. In the former he finds the martyrs regretting their rashness, and only sustained in their resolution by pride; in the latter he discovers mourners consoling themselves in strange but historic fashion for their nightly vigils by the martyrs' graves. Other tempters haunt him next—Simon Magus, an Indian gymnosophist, Apollonius of Tyana; and the last especially almost converts him with his pompous theosophy. Then Hilarion reappears, and causes all the gods of old, from formless idols to the inhabitants of Olympus, to file before Antony. He recounts the chief points of the respective cults, and while he makes them all ridiculous, he puts them in such a fashion as always to recall something similar in the Christian faith or practice. The procession is closed by Jehovah Himself, who laments the overthrow of His service at Jerusalem.

At last Hilarion declares himself. He is the devil, ready to show himself, if Antony will, in his proper form. The saint, struck with curiosity, consents, and the devil, obtaining by this consent some power over him, carries him off as on a cloud into space. There he reveals to him the truths of natural philosophy. The sun does not set, there is no firmament, all things are infinite, and the saint receives from the devil explanations more and more Pantheistic, which lead up subtly to the last suggestion, "Suppose there should be no God?" But Antony has just resolution enough to refuse the fatal answer, and the fiend disappears. The temptation, however, is not over. Two women, one old and withered, one young and fair, dispute him. One is Death, the other Vice. Death offers him rest, Vice offers him pleasure. They wrangle over him, each

striving to show that the joys which the other can offer are paralleled by her own; and at last they wrestle with one another, and disappear, strangely blended in one monstrous figure. Saint Antony has still his philosophical ideas in his head, and he begins to reason somewhat arrogantly on what he has seen. Then the Sphinx and the Chimera present themselves, and these two emblems of philosophical speculation argue like mediæval disputants. They are followed by a procession of the "fauna of fancy"—the pigmies and all the fantastic tribes that Herodotus tells of—the basilisk, the unicorn, and their fellows. All mysteries of the living world pass before Antony, down to the creatures of the microscope, until once more the Pantheist ideal comes back on him, and he nearly blasphemes. Then the day dawns, the sun rises, and in the middle of the sun glows forth the face of Christ. The saint crosses himself and falls on his knees.

This *Temptation* is my own favourite among its author's books. It is the best example of dream-literature that I know, and the capacities of dreams and hallucinations for literary treatment are undoubted. But most writers, including even De Quincey, who have tried this style, have erred, inasmuch as they have endeavoured to throw a portion of the mystery with which the waking mind invests dreams over the dream itself. Any one's experience is sufficient to show that this is wrong. The events of dreams as they happen are quite plain and matter-of-fact, and it is only in the intervals, and, so to speak, the scene-shifting of dreaming, that any suspicion of strangeness occurs to the dreamer. This truth is fully kept in view in *La Tentation*, and I do not know any other book in which it is so kept. One views all Antony's experiences exactly as Antony himself would have viewed them.

The occasional misgiving of the supernatural is there; but the actually supernatural occurrences are related with strict simplicity and verisimilitude.

In 1877 Flaubert published, under the title of *Trois Contes*, a volume which has the curious merit of giving in little examples, and very perfect examples, of all the styles which have made him famous. *Un Cœur Simple* displays exactly the same qualities of minute and exact observation, the same unlimited fidelity of draughtsmanship, which distinguish *Madame Bovary* and *L'Éducation Sentimentale*. *La Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier* shows the same power over the mystical and the vague which is shown in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. *Hérodias* has the gorgeousness, the barbaric colours, and the horror of *Salammbô*. Of the three I have no hesitation in preferring *La Légende de Saint Julien*. The history of the Norman *bonne* Félicité, her fidelity, her narrow brain, her large heart, the way in which employers, relations, and all connected with her make use of her and owe her no thanks, is a wonderful *tour de force*, but it has the defects of its quality. One feels that the author is in effect saying, "I am going to make you, whether you will or no, take an interest in this commonplace picture of humble life"; and though he is successful, there is a certain sense of effort and of disproportion. *Hérodias*, again, has much the same defects as its prototype. The sketch of Aulus Vitellius is faithfully loathsome, and the scenery of the sketch is as a piece of scene-painting unsurpassable. The breath of the Dead Sea and the desert, the atmosphere of Jewish, Idumæan, and Arab savagery, is all over it; but the "nervous impression" still stands in the way. In *Saint Julien* this is no longer the case, and the effect is admirable.

The legend begins, in true legend-fashion, at the

very birth of the saint. He is the son of a wealthy baron and a noble dame who live at peace and in plenty. At his birth marvels are presaged of him by strange visitants, and he is brought up in all the exercises of chivalry. He early develops, however, a certain propensity to bloodshed. He kills the mice in the chapel, the pigeons in the garden, and soon his advancing years give him the opportunity of indulging this taste in hunting. He spends whole days in the chase, caring less for the sport than for the slaughter. One winter day he starts early, and game is more than usually plentiful. He slays insanely without attempting to retrieve his victims, and at last massacres a whole herd of deer, finding them enclosed in a glen which has no outlet. Then—

Across the valley, at the edge of the forest, he perceived a stag, a hind and her fawn. The stag was black and of huge size. His antlers had sixteen points, and his beard was white. The hind, of the pale colour of dead leaves, was browsing, and gave suck to the dappled fawn without interrupting her steps. The whiz of the crossbow once more sounded and the fawn fell dead. Thereat his mother looking up to heaven belled with a deep voice, agonising and human, and Julian, irritated thereby, stretched her on the ground with a second shot. Then the great stag saw him and made a bound towards him. Julian despatched his last arrow, which hit him full in the forehead and stuck there. But the stag seemed not to feel it. He strode over the bodies, he came nearer and nearer, he was on the point of ripping him up, and Julian shrank back in terror unutterable. But the mighty beast stopped suddenly, and with flaming eyes and a solemn tone, as of a hoary judge, he said three times, while a bell tolled in the distance, "Accursed one! ruthless of heart! thou shalt slay thy father and thy mother." Then his knees tottered, and, closing his eyes, he expired.

Julian returns to the castle horrified at this prediction, and almost immediately accidents happen which seem on the point of fulfilling it. In alarm he quits his home and becomes a wandering soldier. His success in war is equal to his good luck in the chase, and at last he saves the Emperor of Occitania from the

Moslem, marries his daughter, and lives in peace and splendour. But nothing will induce him to hunt, for he fancies that on his abstinence depends the fulfilment of the prediction. His wife tries to combat this idea, and one evening he sets out. For a long time no game at all appears, and when he meets a beast he is either unready for it or he misses it. By degrees his ill-luck becomes mysterious. His lance splinters on the quarry, his arrows stop in mid-course. At length—

All the birds and beasts that he had been pursuing suddenly reappeared and closed round him in a narrow circle. Some were in a sitting posture, others stood upright; he himself remained in the midst, frozen with terror and incapable of movement. With a final effort of will he made a step forward, and then the birds on the branches spread their wings, the beasts on the ground stirred their limbs, all accompanied him. Before him marched the hyenas, and behind him the wolf and the boar. The wild bull on his right swung his head from side to side, and at his left the serpent writhed through the grass, while the panther, arching her back, walked with dainty steps and long strides. He went as slowly as possible for fear of irritating them, and from the thickets there issued in crowds porcupines, foxes, jackals, and bears. He began to run: they ran too. The serpent hissed, the slaver of the foul creatures dropped. The wild boar rubbed his heels with his tusks, the wolf thrust his shaggy head into the hollow of Julian's hand. The monkeys pinched him and grinned, the polecat glided over his feet. With a blow of his paw a bear knocked off his hat, and the panther, as if in scorn of him, tossed away an arrow which she carried in her mouth. In all their gestures there was an air of irony; they watched him out of the corners of their eyes, and seemed plotting vengeance, till, deafened by the buzzing of the insects, blinded by the flapping of the wings, choked by the noisome breath of the beasts, he walked with outstretched hands, and eyes shut like one deprived of sight, and had not even strength to cry for mercy.

No actual injury comes to him from this ghostly procession. Its effect, however, is not to warn, but to provoke him. He is furious at his impotence to harm; and when he is at the edge of the forest, though his hideous escort leaves him as the cock crows, fresh delusions of a minor kind beset him. He makes his way to the castle in a mood of baffled rage, ready to

break out on any object. During his absence his parents, who have wandered all over the earth to find him, have come to his castle. His wife has received them joyfully, and made them rest in her own couch. Julian returns late and silently, sees a beard on the pillow, and, mad with jealousy, slays at a single blow, as he thinks, his wife and her paramour. He is not long in perceiving his mistake, and the horrible crime he has in consequence committed. His resolution is soon taken. He leaves his wife and his riches, and once more becomes a wanderer, but this time a wanderer of a different kind. He turns mendicant friar, giving himself up utterly to penance and good works of all sorts, and finally he establishes himself on the borders of a dangerous river, and ferries over passengers at the hazard of his life and for no reward. At last, one stormy night he is summoned to the other side, and there finds a leper in the most loathsome stage of the disease. With superhuman effort he crosses the stream, but his trial does not, as in the kindred instance of St Christopher, cease there. The leper demands shelter and hospitality, and Julian gives him both, yielding up his whole scanty supply of food and drink,—an act which results, according to the horrible Jewish theory, in the communication of the wretch's disease to the inanimate objects he touches. Then he demands Julian's bed, and it is given him. But he is dying of cold, and Julian must lie down by him, clasp him in his arms, revive him with his own vital heat. It is done.

Then the leper embraced him closely and suddenly; his eyes had the brightness of stars, his hair grew long and shaped like the rays of the sun, the breath of his nostrils was as the sweetness of roses, from the hearth a cloud of incense arose, and the billows of the river sang in harmony. Into the soul of Julian there came an abundance of delight—a joy more than human, and like a mighty wave. But he who held him closer and closer grew and grew till the walls of the hovel on both sides were reached by his

head and his feet. Then the roof parted, and the firmament was seen, and Julian went up the blue spaces of the heaven, face to face with Christ the Lord.

No discussion of Flaubert's merits would be complete without some notice of the Realism of which he was the chief master. I do not know that this unlucky term has been included in the list of those fallen words whose history has been often bewailed, but the idle mind may contemplate with some interest the realism of William of Champeaux side by side with the realism of M. Zola. In the latter sense it is, as the Marquis de Custine called it, a *grossière étiquette* enough, and even, as it seems to me, one of which it is somewhat difficult to understand the precise meaning. As a term of abuse it is as intelligible as most terms of abuse; that is to say, it means that the speaker does not like the thing spoken of. But as a classifying epithet having any literary or scientific value it appears to me to be of but small account. I suppose, if it means anything, it means the faithful patience and the sense of artistic capacity which lead a man to grapple boldly with his subject, whatever that subject may be, and to refuse *tanquam scopulum* easy generalities and accepted phrase. This procedure is naturally more striking when the subject matter is of an unpleasant character, and hence the superficial critic runs away with the idea that realism means the choice of unpleasant subjects. From this to the deliberate choosing of unpleasant subjects, in order to qualify for the title of realist, there is only a step.

Now, in this sense, I venture to say that there is no reason whatever for affixing the "étiquette" to Flaubert. His subjects are doubtless often unpleasant enough, but I cannot see that there is the faintest evidence of their having been chosen for their un-

pleasantness. It is, perhaps, a question whether unpleasantness would not predominate in the absolutely faithful record of any life. It has been said that no man would dare to write such a record of his own history; and all that can be said of Flaubert is that he has dared to do, for certain classes and types, what they dare not do for themselves. The ordinary novel is a compromise and a convention. Of compromises and conventions Flaubert knows nothing. He dares in especial to show failure, and I think it will be found that this is what few novelists dare, unless the failure be of a tragic and striking sort. He draws the hopeful undertakings that come to nothing, the dreams that never in the least become deeds, the good intentions that find their usual end, the evil intentions which also are balked and defeated, the parties of pleasure that end in pain or weariness, the enterprises of pith and moment that somehow fall through. Perhaps this is realism, and, if it be, it seems to me that realism is a very good thing. It is pleasant doubtless to read about Sindbad as he comes home in triumph regularly after every voyage with his thousands or his millions of sequins. But the majority of Sindbads have experiences of a somewhat different sort, and I do not see why the majority also should not have their bard.

The antagonism, however, which has grown up as a matter of association between real and ideal makes the use of this word realism in this sense distinctly objectionable, for it leads the reader to suppose that a realist must necessarily be unideal. How far this supposition, taken in a prejudicial sense, may lead even grave and sober judges astray, may be seen in some criticisms on our author. One French critic, to whom I have before referred, M. Saint-René Taillandier, persuaded himself that *Salammbô* is an attack on the idea of womanhood,

that *L'Éducation Sentimentale* is an attack on the idea of manhood, and that *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* is an attack on the idea of God! Of such a *bêtise* as this it is not easy to speak seriously; one can only fall back on the Dominie's vocabulary, and exclaim, "Prodigious!"

Enough must have been said to bear out the contention I have already made that the importance of Flaubert is very much greater as a maker of literature than as a maker of novels, though I am far from inferring that in the latter capacity he must not be allowed very high rank. His observation of the types of human nature which he selects for study is astonishingly close and complete; his attention to unity of character never sleeps, and he has to a very remarkable degree the art of chaining the attention even when the subject is a distasteful one to the reader. He has been denied imagination, but I cannot suppose that the denial was the result of a full perusal of his work. The reader of *Madame Bovary* only might possibly be excused for making such a charge, the reader of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* only would be almost certain to make it. But *Salammbô* supplies an almost sufficient answer to it, and *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, together with the *Trois Contes*, an answer very much more than sufficient. His imagination, however, is poetic rather than fictitious; it does not supply him with a rush of lively creations like the imaginations of the Scotts and the Sands, but with fantastic and monstrous figures, which his admirable writing power enables his readers to perceive likewise, and that not dimly, nor through a misty and hazy atmosphere. There are few things more curious than the combination of such an imagination with the photographic clearness of observation and reproduction which his less imaginative work displays.

His unpopularity as a novelist, such as it is, arises, I must repeat, in reality principally from the fact that he is a writer who not only deserves but demands to be read twice and thrice before he can be fully enjoyed. I have mentioned my own impression in first reading *Salammbô*—how I wondered at the lack of interest (as it then seemed to me) which distinguished it, although at the same time I found it impossible to drop or skip it, and how years afterwards I read it again, and then it no longer seemed to me to lack interest, and I was no longer in doubt as to what had made me read it through at first almost against my will. Much the same thing occurs, I think, with all Flaubert's books. One is struck at first by what can only be called the unpleasantness of the subject, and this colours the judgment. At the second reading the subject has ceased to engage the attention mainly, and the wonderful excellences of the treatment become visible, and at every subsequent reading this excellence becomes more and more apparent.

How great it is has rarely been denied by competent persons. Even M. Scherer, whose antipathy to certain subjects and certain styles not unfrequently weakened his critical faculty, had to confess how unmistakable was Flaubert's position, *comme écrivain*. Hazlitt says somewhere about Shakespeare that he is not for or against his characters. The same thing is eminently true of Flaubert. He is in his own person a sufficient and victorious refutation of the theory which will have it that the artist's choice of subjects must express his personal tastes. Flaubert is altogether an outsider to his subjects; as Falstaff would say, they have lain in his way and he has found them. These subjects are in a manner revealed to him, and the details hold therefore much the same place as the exact and careful

enumeration of the armies of doubters and bloodmen in Bunyan's *Holy War*. The extraordinary pains which he takes to secure accuracy in matters of reference are sufficiently shown in the controversy which he carried on respecting *Salammbô* with an antiquarian critic, and his accuracy in describing his own impressions and imaginations may be assumed to be equally minute. We cannot imagine Flaubert suppressing an idea because it was troublesome to express or unpleasant to handle, or in any other way intractable. He is altogether of the opinion of Gautier in his contempt for the writer whose thoughts find him unequal to the task of giving them expression, and he may be assumed to be of Gautier's opinion also respecting the excellence of dictionaries as reading, for his vocabulary is simply unlimited.

Now all these characteristics are distinctly those of the abstract *littérateur* rather than those of the novelist. There is probably no other literary form in which they could have been so well displayed as in the novel, certainly there is none in which they would have been so satisfactorily enjoyed. One takes up Flaubert and reads a chapter, or two or three, with hardly any reference to the already familiar story. His separate tableaux are, as I have said, admirably and irreproachably combined. But their individual merit is so great that they possess interest independently of the combination. He is a writer upon whom one can try experiments with one's different moods, very much as one can try experiments with different lights upon a picture. The immense labour which he has evidently spent upon his work has resulted in equally immense excellence. His cabinets have secret drawers in them which are only discoverable after long familiarity. It has been justly said of him that he can do with a couple

of epithets what Balzac takes a page of laborious analysis to do less perfectly. All this is so rarely characteristic of a novelist, that it has, perhaps, seemed to some people incompatible with the novelist's qualities—a paralogism excusable enough in the mere subscriber to the circulating library, but certainly not excusable in the critic. Flaubert was a novelist, and a great one. As a dramatist or a poet he might, had his genius so inclined him, have been greater still in the general estimation; but he could hardly have been greater in the estimation of those who are content to welcome greatness in the form in which it chooses to present itself, instead of suggesting that it should suit its costume to their preconceived ideas.

Since Flaubert's death in 1881 a very unusual amount, not of new matter whereon to found criticism, but of documents important for correcting and checking criticism already made, has been published respecting him. In the first place there appeared the posthumous work (on which a few remarks have been inserted above), *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. This is Flaubert's only failure. In design it is something like a particularisation with immense developments of the plan of *Gulliver's Travels*: indeed, Flaubert might be accused of having, in it, justified to some extent M. Taillandier's preposterous criticism given above. Two Parisian *employés* who possess between them a moderate fortune, go into the country to enjoy themselves for the remainder of their days, and are most dismally disappointed. They try history only to find it all apples of Sodom, literature only to be bored and disenchanted, science only to potter and fail, benevolence only for their protégés to turn out worthless, even vice to a certain extent only to find that it is very bitter in the

belly and not very sweet in the mouth. In the *scenario* of the unfinished part it is written, "Ainsi tout leur a craqué dans la main." Now this, though a very ambitious, is not an impossible scheme. The Preacher did it and more than it in a dozen pages long ago: Mr Thackeray has done not much less in a dozen volumes. Whether in the heyday of his strength Flaubert could have done it is a might-have-been argument of no great importance. As a fact he did not.

Meanwhile general interest (which at the date of the bulk of this essay was not strong) in Flaubert had been growing, and his younger friends the Naturalists had been distorting his method, or something as near it as they could reach, in a very surprising manner. Even earlier gossip had talked of a certain club of four—Flaubert, M. Zola, M. Daudet, and the Russian novelist Tourguéneff—who met and talked enormities from time to time. Not very long after Flaubert's death appeared the reminiscences of his much earlier friend, M. Maxime du Camp, which contained a good deal about the author of *Madame Bovary*, and developed a complete theory about his peculiarities, to the effect that a serious illness which he had had in early manhood had in some curious fashion arrested his creative power—all his ideas having been formed previously—but had left him the merely literary faculty in full strength. This excited no little wrath among Flaubert's later friends, and besides indulging in various polemical writings, they began a series of publications of his letters (and of a few unimportant early works) which has lasted to the present time. By these letters (the earliest instalment of which was an especially interesting correspondence with George Sand) and by other documents, two facts of great interest and importance were made clear. The first was that Flaubert's admir-

able style (which had struck all fit, however few, readers before) was the result of a perfectly Herculean study of the *mot propre*; the second, which had been also anticipated by critics, that Flaubert occupied a very singular middle position between Romanticism and Naturalism, between the theory of literary art which places the idealising of merely observed facts first of all, and is sometimes not too careful about the observation, and the theory which places the observation first if not also last, and is sometimes ostentatiously careless of any idealising whatsoever. The publication of these personal details excited, as is the way of the world, a much wider though perhaps not a more intelligent interest in Flaubert than had previously existed, and discussions on him in current literature have been proportionately more active. But I do not know that there is much to add to the criticism given above. In style of the less spontaneous and more studied kind Flaubert has few if any superiors; in satirical contemplation of what is not the joy of living he has even fewer, perhaps none; in maintaining, in spite of his own realist rummaging of the "document," the absolute prerogative, and what is more, the absolute duty of art to idealise and transcend, he stands alone among writers of recent days. With a happier temperament and *milieu* he might (it is not certain that he would) have done things even better; with what he had he did great things. And especially he was a living and writing witness, too much of their own to be refused, as to the fatal error of the degenerate Realist or Naturalist school¹.

¹ Quite recently early and hitherto *anecdota* works of Flaubert have been published. An article by the present writer on them will be found in the *Athenæum* for 1919. But it does not seem necessary to add to this essay by talking about them, or about his epilepsy, or about scandals attaching to his life. The real work is the real thing (1924).

III

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL¹ [1879]

AMONG the many classes into which literature and literary men may be divided, there is one, the contents and members of which are only half literary. Whenever a certain stage of society is reached, the art of managing words becomes fashionable like any other art, and practitioners of it arise whose main object is to recommend themselves to their society by their dexterity. Not only is this process a certain one in point of time, but it has also certain constant and unvarying peculiarities. The persons who thus distinguish themselves as wits (for that, though not an altogether satisfactory term, is the only one that occurs to me) are usually born members of their society at first. By degrees they become members in virtue of their qualifications for the practice. The catalogue begins with Chesterfields and Saint-Évremonds, but it is pretty sure to end with Chamforts and Sydney Smiths. It is also noticeable that the men of this class rarely succeed in the highest degree when they endeavour to produce serious literary work. Their reputation lives, but the inquirer into that reputation very often fails to discern much ground for it in the definite work which they leave behind them. Chester-

¹ Since this essay was first written fresh selections have been made by M. de Lescure, who has also added much to our biographical knowledge, especially of Rivarol. As, however, I deal here with the work rather than with the lives, it does not seem necessary to do more than refer the studious reader to this authority, and to show that in Rivarol's case, as in De Quincey's, scepticism as to his own accounts of himself seems to have rather overshot the mark (1892). This note, I think, is still sufficient on the general point: but a very few corrections in text and notes have been admitted (1924).

field's *Letters* is, indeed, a performance of great merit, and extraordinarily undervalued nowadays. Saint-Évremond's *Historiette* of the Père Canaye is a triumph of quiet irony. But posterity has altogether declined to acknowledge *La Jeune Indienne* as possessing the least claim to be read; and pleasant as is *Peter Plymley*, the political interest, that is to say, the least lasting of all interests for all but a few students in all but a few cases, is the best of it. The fame of the brotherhood rests mainly on the memory of their talk—sometimes preserved more or less faithfully in recorded witticisms, sometimes demanding to be taken altogether on trust. In the latter case the reputation of such men is apt to die away almost as soon as the society which knew them is gone. In the former they are saved by the fact of their being, in Fuseli's blunt language, "D—d good to steal from."

There are many reasons why this class should be better represented in French than in any other language. The joint revolution, which passed more than three hundred years ago over French society and French literature, helped the natural tendency of the race to produce them. The peculiar saline quality, which owes its name to Latin, but in which Roman writers are so singularly deficient, manifested itself as soon as Frenchmen began to write at all, probably as soon as they began to speak. But, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Malherbe and Balzac and the Academy conspired to make the language more suitable for polished and yet pregnant witticism than it had ever been before; while Richelieu and Madame de Rambouillet conspired, quite innocently, to provide a public greedy of such utterances, and quick to reward in various ways those who could make them. Among the earliest, and certainly among the most distinguished

of the class, was, as I have said, Saint-Évremond¹, a man of a curious idiosyncrasy, half French and half English, possessing, among other un-French gifts, the gift of sustained irony, without the least snigger of countenance or quaver of voice. For a century and a half emulous followers endeavoured to supply Saint-Évremond's place, and in the five-and-twenty or thirty years before the Revolution the crop of wits was at its thickest. The *Philosophe* movement had had the effect of opening society to almost any one who had brains and a decent exterior, and the memorable disgust with which M. de Castries talked of a certain famous quarrel² was not shared by many of his contemporaries. Envious rivals might assert with perfect truth that M. de Chamfort had made himself a present both of the Chamfort and of the De. The same persons might remark, truly or not, that M. le Comte de Rivarol, or M. le Chevalier de Parcieux (for Rivarol oscillated between these two pleasing titles), was, in plain French, an inn-keeper's son, of the name of Riverot. But the great folks whom they amused cared very little for this even before the Revolution broke out, and when it had once broken out there was no longer any question about names or fathers. The wit of the salons promptly became a pamphleteer on one side or the other, and helped to point and wing the darts which both sides so freely flung. This group—Rulhière, Chamfort, Rivarol, Champcenetz, Laclos, Garat, and the rest—not merely figure as links between the chamber-wits of the eighteenth century and the journalists of the nineteenth, but in their persons, for the most part, served first in one class and then in the other. Indeed, in the condition to which they had brought the business of wit, it was only a variety of journalism, save that the sharp things said

¹ *Vide inf.* p. 96.

² Between Rousseau and Diderot.

on current events were said to a smaller public, and were reproduced by a less trustworthy medium than the press.

Of this group the most remarkable beyond doubt were the two men whose names stand at the head of this essay. They were both (to use a cant phrase which has been invented since their day) self-made men, they both illustrated in ways slightly different some of the most remarkable aspects of the French literary genius, and they have both left on record some of the sharpest and strongest-winged sayings that human ingenuity has ever framed. Neither—Chamfort even less than Rivarol—has left any single or definite literary work of great or decided value. One, from the accidents of his history as well as from his temperament and disposition, took the popular side in the great schism of the last decade of the eighteenth century, and had occasion amply to repent it. The other, less impulsive and more clear-sighted, took the side of precedent and authority, supported it with all his might, and derived profit from it, though he died long before its temporary triumph. Since their death the so-called works of both have been collected into what Mr Carlyle has called formless agglomerations, a careless study of which might lead men to wonder how two such men should possibly have set their names to work so frequently spiritless and jejune. The standard edition of Chamfort published a hundred years ago in five volumes is reasonably complete, but cumbrous and unattractive in form. The author's writings—tales more indecent than those of La Fontaine or even the *fabliau* writers, but curiously lacking in pungency, academic discourses, reviews, dramas, and last, but of almost sole importance, maxims and anecdotes—are all to be found there. Rivarol has been less fortunate.

The so-called *Œuvres Complètes* published at the beginning of the last century by Fayolle and Chênedollé are anything but complete. They have to be supplemented by a volume of *Pensées Inédites* which appeared in 1836, and by a collection published in 1877 by M. Poulet-Malassis. In this latter, the editor has rescued from the *Journal Politique National* a *Lettre sur la Capture de l'Abbé Maury à Peronne*, which he not unjustly compares to Saint-Évremond's already mentioned masterpiece, and which will also remind some readers of Gérard de Nerval's adventure with the gendarmes at Crespy. Both Chamfort and Rivarol have been more than once subjected to the process of selection, for which they are peculiarly adapted, but which is in their case no easy task. M. Poulet-Malassis alludes to a satisfactory selection of Rivarol as at last about to appear; but I have never heard of its appearance, and it is much to be feared that it must have been one of the projects which his own death cut short¹. At present many of Rivarol's best things have to be sought for in his mostly dreary and unequal treatise *De l'Homme Intellectuel et Moral*, or else taken on trust through the medium of not too judicious selectors. Even as it is, however, the brighter and sometimes traditional sayings of both have served thousands of duller labourers with the pen as seasonings to render palatable their own savourless compositions. These sayings and a few of their longer works are naturally the most interesting points about them; but their personal history is not unimportant towards a due apprehension of them, and to this I may give a few lines in the first place.

Chamfort, who was born in 1741, was of illegitimate birth. All that we hear of his mother is that she was

¹ See note above, p. 66.

somebody's companion, and the only name to which the future wit seems to have had any right was the simple baptismal name of Nicolas. M. Nicolas, however, was not so well contented with that title as his remarkable contemporary Restif de la Bretonne, and he had not, like the latter, a genealogy dating from the Emperor Pertinax to fall back upon. Somehow or other he obtained a good scholarship at an endowed school, and there received a thorough education according to the ideas of the time, an education, the test and mark of which were successful prize poems and essays. The French world of those days, if not of these, offered considerable opportunities to any one who was *fort en thème*. The frequent prize competitions of the Academy supplied an easy introduction, not merely to a literary career, but also to a warm reception in salons and supper parties. It is true that these competitions, as Mademoiselle de Lespinasse's letters and many other documents tell us, did not go entirely by merit, but still there was enough of impartiality in the transaction to give deserving literary aspirants a very fair chance. It was by this means that La Harpe, to whom we must, I suppose, allow a certain amount of hopelessly ill-directed faculty, made his way, and it was by this means that Chamfort also made his way by overcoming La Harpe. He was at once launched in the literary society of the time, and succeeded well. He could make excellent love and tolerable literature, faculties which at that date rarely missed their due reward. Competent and not ill-natured judges—Diderot and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse herself—accuse him of not taking his triumphs as modestly as he might have done. But even this was hardly looked on as a demerit. Madame Helvétius, a nursing mother of the philosophers, gave him free board and lodgings at

Sèvres; Chabanon, a sympathising literary man, made over to him a small but comfortable pension; and for many years, without more serious literary labours than the production of a few *éloges* and plays, he lived in the curious way in which people did then live, literally by his wit, if not by his wits.

At the Revolution, the violent anti-royalist part which he took surprised both sides. For some years he was, or pretended to be, the life and soul of the revolutionary party as far as wit went. He it is who claims the origination of the famous title of Sieyès' famous pamphlet on the Tiers État; he it was who formulated the equally famous *guerre aux châteaux, paix aux chaumières*. At one moment he was inspiring Mirabeau, at another he was being saluted in the clubs as "La Rochefoucauld-Chamfort." There is not, as it seems to me, any great mystery in his having taken this course. It is clear, from all we hear of him, that the stigma of his origin weighed heavily upon him, and that he, like many other sufferers from use and wont, looked on the Revolution as a moment of revenge. He seems also to have had a genuine belief in a good time coming. But he had little fanaticism in the matter, and his caustic tongue was guided chiefly by the *frondeur* spirit which has so often animated distinguished Frenchmen. After a time his witticisms began to take a dubiously patriotic turn. "Be my brother or I will kill you," was not a definition of revolutionary conduct likely to find favour with revolutionists. He was accused and imprisoned, released, but threatened with imprisonment again. Then he tried to make away with himself, but pistol and knife would not help him. He only succeeded in maiming and gashing himself in a ghastly fashion, and died after many days.

This horrible death figures in a most striking story,

the *Prophecy of Cazotte*, which has often been told before, but is too remarkable to be omitted here. According to La Harpe—testimony, it should be remembered, given many years after the event—a brilliant company were collected, some time in the year 1788, at the house of some unnamed academician, who was also a man of high rank. Among them were assembled Chamfort, La Harpe himself, Condorcet, Bailly, Cazotte, the learned Vicq d'Azyr, Roucher, chief poet of the deplorable descriptive school which Saint-Lambert and Delille had introduced, and many others, with a plentiful admixture of merely fashionable company, and numerous ladies, with Madame de Grammont at their head. The company, if we may trust La Harpe, who had, it must be remembered, become at the time of writing violently orthodox (so that Marie Joseph Chénier contrasted his *feu céleste* with Naigeon's *feu d'enfer*), had been indulging in free feasting and free drinking of the kind recorded in fable of the Holbachians. Chamfort had read "impious and libertine tales," for which the reader of his works will not search in vain. A guest had informed the audience that he did not believe in the existence of God, and that he did believe that Homer was a fool. Another had cited with gusto the remark of his barber, "I am not a gentleman, sir; but I assure you I am not a bit more religious than if I were." Encouraged by these cheering instances, the company begin to forecast the good time coming. Suddenly Cazotte, who was known as an oddity and an *illuminé*, as well as from his admirable tale, the *Diable Amoureux*, breaks in. The good time *will* come, and he can tell them what its fruits will be. Condorcet will die self-poisoned on a prison floor; Chamfort will give himself a score of gashes in the vain hope of escaping from the Golden Age. As each guest, treating

the matter at first as a joke, ironically asks for his own fate, the revelations grow more precise. Vicq d'Azyr, Bailly, Roucher have their evil fortunes told. At last the crowning moment of incredulity is reached when the prophet announces the fate of La Harpe. "La Harpe sera chrétien." The company are almost consoled when they think that their own misfortunes depend necessarily upon such an impossible contingency as this. But there is still an unpleasant impression from the gravity and the mystical reputation of the speaker. To dissipate it Madame de Grammont makes some light remark about the hardship which, by the conventions of society, prevents women from reaping the fruits of the Revolution. Cazotte replies to her promptly. There is no exemption for women in the Golden Age. She herself, her friends, and even her betters will share the fate of Bailly and Roucher. "At least," she cries, "you will give me the consolation of a confessor?" "No," is the answer. "The last victim who will be so attended will die before you, and he will be the King of France." This is too much even for such an assembly, and the host interferes. But the valiant duchess is irrepressible. She asks Cazotte whether he alone is exempted from all these evils, and receives for answer only a gloomy quotation from Josephus, relating to the fate of the madman who at the siege of Jerusalem ended his forebodings by crying, "Woe to myself!" Then Cazotte makes his bow and leaves the room. Before six years had passed every word of his prophecy was fulfilled. Vicq d'Azyr had succeeded, and Chamfort had failed, in their attempts to copy the high Roman fashion. Roucher and Bailly and Madame de Grammont and the rest had looked through the dismal window, and Cazotte himself had been the hero of perhaps the most famous and most pitiful of the

revolutionary legends. As for the Christianity of La Harpe, that perhaps is a question of definition¹.

The history of Rivarol is curiously different. Chamfort is a distinctly melancholy figure: he is full of gall and wormwood; his life is passed half in attempts at great passions, and half in regrets at not achieving them, and his end is sinister and ghastly almost beyond comparison. His rival has nothing of this Timon-Heraclitus air about him. Even less seems to be known of his youth (with the exception of the innkeeperhood of his father)² than of Chamfort's. But Rivarol was born in lawiul wedlock about the middle of the century, and seems to have had some claims to nobility *à la mode de Gascogne*. He is, indeed, despite an alleged Italian origin, a Gascon all over: in his imperturbable self-conceit, in his determination to take all things at their best and sunniest, in his keen apprehension of the side on which his bread was buttered, and in a certain lightness and springiness of character which stood him in good stead. He began his literary career with somewhat formidable works—a translation of Dante's *Inferno*, with comments, and a *Discourse on the Universality of the French Tongue*. There is great literary promise in both these works; indeed Rivarol, merely as a writer, ranks far above Chamfort. The limited range and, at the same time, the inflated style of the period, is admirably shown in both the comment and the discourse. The essay which prefaced his Dante is very curious to read. It gives the idea of a man who is thoroughly aware of the weaknesses of his day, and thoroughly determined to fall in with them, though he

¹ There has been an increasing tendency of late to take it for granted that this striking story was an invention of La Harpe's. If it be so, La Harpe was a much cleverer fellow than he appears in his undoubtedly original work.

² See note at beginning of this essay.

himself does not wholly share them. It has the suspicion of insincerity that nearly all his work has, but it gives an undoubted idea of power. Of the discourse, perhaps no better idea can be given than by the sentence in which the author expresses its essence, “La langue Française est la seule qui ait une probité attachée à son génie.” It is impossible to imagine a cleverer and more audacious translation into the moral jargon of the time, of the simple statement that French is the clearest of European languages.

In the year before the Revolution, however, Rivarol tried a very different style. His *Petit Almanach de nos Grands Hommes pour l'année 1788*, an alphabetical handbook of authors, is one of the most venomous, but at the same time one of the most charming literary skits that have ever appeared. The mania for gorgeous appellations which had seized upon literary men gave Rivarol plenty of handle, and to this day it is impossible to avoid laughing at the unlucky victims whose titles he discovered, or in some cases invented. There is M. Duhaussy de Robecourt, author of a touching poem with the refrain—

Et je voudrais pour tout potage
Des pommes cuites avec vous—

which must surely have inspired the author of *Doctor Syntax* with his equally touching but less famous romance of which each verse ends—

Give me the table-flap, the mutton bone, and Mary.

There is M. Fenouillot de Falbaire de Quingei, whose name alone ought to be sufficient to gain him a high rank in literature. There is M. de Saint-Ange, hero of the following exquisite quatrain, which Molière ought to have lived to hear—

Rival d'Ovide et saint ! Quel assemblage étrange !
À l'heureux traducteur d'un tendre original
Le nom de Saint paraît convenir assez mal.
Mais ses vers ont prouvé qu'il a l'esprit d'un Ange !

It is needless to say that this publication provoked some rather warm displays of feeling from the brother men of letters, who found themselves classed with these fantastic personages. But before long the Revolution broke out, and Rivarol at once and without hesitation took the Royalist side. It does not appear that his motives were altogether sordid, and he was probably influenced to a great extent by the same hatred which his countryman, Gautier, afterwards bore and expressed to *la stupidité égalitaire*. His articles in the *Journal Politique National* are vigorous enough, and have the curious tone of laboured conviction which is characteristic of Rivarol's serious work, and of which one is at a loss to gauge the sincerity, though it induces us to believe him insincere. He very soon had occasion to leave the country, and spent the last ten years of his life in Brussels, London, Hamburg, and Berlin, rejoicing a good deal in the society first of a certain Manette, then of a Russian princess; writing a little under strong stress of publishers, and often delighting young Frenchmen who were introduced to him by the brilliancy of his conversation. It is to one of these neophytes that we owe not merely the best account of his ways, but also the preservation of some of the best of his good things. This was Chênedollé, an amiable man of letters, a poet as poets went between the days of André Chénier and of Lamartine, and the friend of Joubert, of Châteaubriand, and of a great many other persons more distinguished than himself. Rivarol died at Berlin in the spring of 1801, being then some fifty years old.

Before discussing the work from which these two

men derived their principal and most permanent reputation, it may be well to say a very few words on the absolute and relative literary merit of their longer and more regular compositions. The fact that they were the two prominent swordsmen on the two opposing sides, has led to a good deal of partial judgment of them in France. Chamfort has sometimes been represented as a mere pander to the vicious tastes of the great; Rivarol as a scurrilous denizen of Grub Street, who adopted the Royalist side merely because it seemed likely to pay the best. Literary as well as moral value has been adjudged or denied to both in the same way. For my own part, and postponing the question of wit, I think that Rivarol has certainly the higher claims in matter of literature. Chamfort's serious productions are hardly readable nowadays. The plays are not readable at all. The *Tableaux de la Révolution* are feeble and wordy. The *Éloge* on Molière is a mere schoolboy performance, and that on La Fontaine, though very much better, is not up to the level of even good second-rate criticism. It is otherwise with M. le Comte de Rivarol. Sainte-Beuve acknowledges that he is *presque un grand écrivain*, and I venture to think that the *presque* expresses very close contiguity. But what is more remarkable about him even than his manner is his matter. His essay on the French language, his essay on Dante, are written with very insufficient knowledge, and from a critical standpoint entirely opposed to our present points of view. Yet it is remarkable how Rivarol's divination supplies his lack of knowledge; how just his thoughts are; how strikingly they differ from the accepted notions of the La Harpes and the Suardes. His translation, or rather paraphrase, of the *Inferno*, shows him chiefly as a master of language; but the essays which precede it

give him independent rank as a student and critic of thought.

We may now pass from the work which did not give our authors their reputation to that which did. This latter is of an exceedingly miscellaneous and in parts of a rather problematical kind. It consists partly of regular *pensées* or maxims of the kind produced by Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues, and Joubert. But it consists also, and in still larger measure, of anecdotes and of actual conversation and table-talk collected and handed down by authorities more or less trustworthy. To this may perhaps be added the *Petit Almanach des Grands Hommes*, which Rivarol and Champcenetz launched at their contemporaries, and the axioms drawn from *De l'Homme*. The total has served hundreds of writers since the time of the originals as a quarry, or perhaps, to use a more appropriate metaphor, as a spice-box. Its contents rarely possess the weight and fulness of the great *pensée*-writers; the truths expressed are generally alloyed to no small extent, and there is much of mere personality and of the spite of the moment. But at its best the stuff displays an extraordinary quickness of intelligence and facility of wit, while even at its worst it has the merit of illuminating, not merely a dead state of society, but something which is living and not likely to die, the part or aspect of human nature which gave to that society most of its characteristic features.

Chamfort himself defines a maxim as a product of the labour of a clever man intended to spare fools trouble. The fools who should take his own efforts of the kind, and adopt them without examination, would certainly justify their title to the designation. There is always abundance of insight in them, but the insight is rarely directed to the whole of the subject. The two

most famous of all his sayings are his definition of love and his remark as to the cleansing of Augean stables. It is noteworthy, however, that the former is usually given imperfectly, and that the latter is often altered so as to be hardly recognisable. When Chamfort asserted that "*l'amour ce n'est que l'échange de deux fantaisies, et le contact de deux épidermes*" it was with the important qualification, "*l'amour tel qu'il existe dans la société.*" When he asserted the necessary connection between revolution and violence, the phrase was not, as is so often said, "you cannot make revolutions with rosewater," but "you cannot cleanse the stable of Augeas with a dusting-brush." Of his more high-flown sayings, "*Il faut recommencer la société humaine*" is perhaps as fair a specimen as can be found. It is striking, and carefully abstains from committing the speaker to details; a frequent characteristic of Chamfort's political maxims. Here is one, however, of far sharper point and more definite aim: "*La noblesse, disent les nobles, est un intermédiaire entre le Roi et le peuple.... Oui, comme le chien de chasse est intermédiaire entre le chasseur et les lièvres.*" It is remarkable, again, to find a professed man of letters aiming such a shot as this at a favourite literary paradox on politics: "There are people who pardon all the ill that priests have done, because had it not been for the priests we should never have had *Tartuffe*." On the whole, however, his political sayings seem to me his worst. They are animated, indeed, by a really genuine if not fanatical enthusiasm for the popular cause, and by a clear, and, as I think, on the whole unselfish comprehension of the evils of the old régime. But they are decidedly one-sided, and there are traces about them of the personal prejudices of a nameless man who felt himself injured, in rank if not

in pocket, by a convention of society. This element of personality may probably account to some extent for the speedy revulsion which came over him, and made him so soon "suspect." Châteaubriand, who knew him, has remarked that he could not himself understand how Chamfort could ever have seriously espoused any political cause whatever. There must have been something in his manner which caused this wonder, for his language is expressive enough of conviction. A remarkable sourness reappears in his speeches on other subjects. He is always complaining—very unjustly as it seems in his own case—of the scanty encouragement given to men of letters. "Men of letters," he says, "are like peacocks, to whom a grain or two of corn is grudgingly thrown, and who are brought out now and then to show off their feathers, while cocks and hens and ducks and turkeys are stuffing their fill." But it is on another subject that, like most of his contemporaries, he is chiefly eloquent. The famous and already quoted definition of love might lead us to suppose him a mere cynic. He has, however, and not unfrequently, his moments of *sensibilité*. "Quelque mal qu'un homme puisse penser des femmes, il n'y a pas de femme qui n'en pense encore plus mal que lui," is one of his most savage sayings of the first kind, and it is abundantly supported by others.

"Avez-vous jamais connu une femme qui, voyant un de ses amis assidu auprès d'une autre femme, ait supposé que cette autre femme lui fut cruelle? On voit par là l'opinion qu'elles ont les unes des autres. Tirez vos conclusions."

"On n'est tout-à-fait la dupe d'une femme tant qu'elle n'est point la vôtre."

"On serait trop malheureux si auprès des femmes on se souvenait de ce qu'on sait par cœur."

On the other hand, the author of that other saying, "La pire des mésalliances est celle du cœur," cannot have been a mere railer, and there are many other signs in his work that he had had to choke down not a little sentiment. In almost all his miscellaneous *mots* there is a distinct undercurrent of sadness. "Il faut," he says in one place, "agir davantage, penser moins, et ne pas se regarder vivre." But it is clear that he did look at himself as he lived, and that the spectacle did not satisfy him. "Ce que j'ai appris je ne le sais plus, le peu que je sais je l'ai deviné" may be a remnant of his days of what Diderot called "suffisance bien conditionnée." He often speaks too of his "celebrity" as if it were a quite incontestable fact. Yet ten years before his death he could say that "he had lost the passions that rendered society supportable, and saw nothing in it but folly and wretchedness."

The most popular, however, and not the least interesting side of Chamfort's talent remains to be noticed. He has left us a collection of anecdotes which surpasses in vivacity, in keenness of observation, and in power of invention, anything else of the kind which exists. That in many, if not in most cases, the right of invention as well as of careful observation and witty expression is his, seems not doubtful. His anecdotes are, moreover, for the most part anecdotes with a purpose, and the purpose is to show the folly, the vanity, and the vices of the society which Chamfort knew so well and hated so much. It is impossible to read a single page of them without finding striking examples, but I can only quote a few of the happiest and most characteristic, and at the same time the least known. For there are not a few of Chamfort's sayings and stories which are already known by quotation to all the world. Out of the others might be composed

a tableau of the later eighteenth century, its men of fashion and its men of letters, its actresses and its great ladies, its ceremonies and its philosophy. There is the noble academician, canvassed by a candidate who has insulted him forty years before, receiving him with the utmost politeness, complimenting him on his literary successes, and at last bowing him out with the words, "Adieu, M. le Comte, je vous félicite de n'avoir plus de mémoire." There is the man who refuses to marry his friend and beloved hostess because "he should not know where to spend his evenings." There is Broglie, the war-god, who is willing to allow that *ce Voltaire* has written one good line:

Le premier qui fut roi fut un soldat heureux.

Or we find ourselves back in the sacred precincts of the Academy—for Chamfort is never tired of girding at his colleagues—and a member is proposing "that not more than four persons be allowed to speak at once"; while Fontenelle, when the question is whether a certain stingy Immortal has or has not paid his subscription, and the good-natured collector remarks, "I believe he did, but I did not see it," rejoins, "I did see it, but I don't believe it." Sometimes the sarcasm flies higher. We are told of the programme of a Cour Plénière which was drawn up for Louis XV, containing not only the remarks that the King was to make, but also stage directions: "Here the King will assume an air of severity"; "At this point his majesty's countenance will unbend itself," and so forth. Elsewhere it is the courtier who defies his enemies to supplant him, "Il n'y a personne ici plus valet que moi." Or, once more, Louis the Wellbeloved lies on his deathbed, indignantly protesting with his last breath against the uncourtly doctor who says to him, "You must" do so and so. Of one story Madame Denis, Voltaire's un-

lucky niece, is the heroine. She is modestly deprecating praises for her acting in *Zaire*. "One ought to be young and beautiful for that," she says. "Ah! madame," replies her well-meaning flatterer, "you have proved the contrary." Then we have the following miracle of the ridiculous-pathetic which deserves quotation at length:

"Madame de H—— me racontait la mort de M. le Duc d'Aumont. 'Cela a tourné bien court,' disait-elle. 'Deux jours auparavant M. Bonvard lui avait permis de manger, et le jour même de sa mort, deux heures avant la récurrence de sa paralysie, il était comme à trente ans, comme il avait été toute sa vie. Il avait demandé son perroquet, avait dit 'Brossez ce fauteuil,' 'Voyons mes deux broderies nouvelles,' enfin toute sa tête, toutes ses idées comme à l'ordinaire.'" Does not this conquer a place among stories of the lightning before death? Nor even after this does the gallery lose its charms. There is the courtier who in unconscious contrast to Massillon's famous opening, remarked at the death of Louis XIV, "Après la mort d'un roi on peut tout croire." Yet a little and we are grieved to hear that Voltaire actually spoke of the divine Emily as "Un cochon qui n'a pas d'organes, qui ne sait pas ce que c'est que l'harmonie." That the majority of the anecdotes are, as this clearly is, ill-natured, is almost to be expected. But what is remarkable about Chamfort is that there is little malice, in the French sense of the word, about him. It is difficult to believe that his unrivalled collection of pathological illustrations gave him the very slightest delight. There is no laugh in them, though they have made so many hundreds of people laugh since they were written and told. The *sacra indignatio* has come upon the satirist, and scorn has apparently ceased to provide him with

any pleasure. One is always expecting Chamfort to change his tone and become a preacher in earnest, bewailing and lamenting instead of merely girding at the follies and vices of his time. The shadow of his death seems to reach backwards.

With this melancholy temperament and sombre habit of thought, the light and mercurial carelessness of Rivarol is in striking contrast. I have said that he seems to me to possess greater literary powers than Chamfort, and a greater faculty of thinking justly on most subjects, if not on any given subject. But whereas Chamfort is frequently sincere, Rivarol hardly knows what sincerity is. He is not consciously or intentionally false, but it becomes very soon evident to his readers that, with immense power of appreciation, he is almost incapable of being really convinced. I have said that his adoption of the Royalist cause does not seem to have been the act of a mere hireling. His acuteness foresaw that the popular party was likely to have some very disagreeable experiences, and that there would be for some time little room there for persons who took merely sarcastic and apolaustic views of life. Whatever may have been his real claim to a place among the nobility, his tastes and his convictions (such as they were) threw him on their side. This had its inconveniences. There is an admirable story which is told, for a wonder, at his expense. Rivarol in the early days of the Revolution had been expatiating on the loss of "nos titres, nos droits," and so forth. Hereat his hearer was heard to mutter *Nos!* with a slight accent of wonder. "Qu'est-ce que vous trouvez là de singulier?" said the Gascon sharply. "C'est le pluriel, mon cher, que je trouve singulier," replied the other¹. As a rule,

¹ Compare Wordsworth's polite "Poets? where are they?" when some unlucky wight had used the plural in his company.

however, it was not Rivarol who played the part of butt in such matters. With less venom than Chamfort, he had an almost unequalled knack of saying insolent things. His remark to the unlucky author of a single couplet, "C'est fort bien, mais il y a des longueurs," is perhaps the best known of all his sayings. And one can imagine the cordial hatred which must have been generally felt towards a man who, meeting the harmless Florian with a manuscript sticking out of his pocket, could exclaim, "Ah, monsieur, si on ne vous connaissait pas on vous volerait."

"Condorcet writes with laudanum on lead paper" is not an extraordinary witticism. But this on the funeral sermons of a certain Abbé de Vauxcelles is again admirable: "On ne sent jamais mieux le néant de l'homme que dans la prose de cet orateur." "Champcenetz c'est mon clair de lune" is a specimen of the amiable speeches he gave to his chief literary coadjutor, himself no despicable wit, who, after his condemnation by the revolutionary tribunal, asked Fouquier-Tinville "whether one could make arrangements for a substitute?" The historian Rulhière, who was one of the most unpopular of men, is said to have complained to Rivarol one day of his ill-repute, remarking, "Je n'ai jamais fait qu'une méchanceté dans ma vie." "Quand finira-t-elle?" was the answer. Some of his less ferocious replies are even better, as this criticism of an epigrammatist, "Ses épigrammes font honneur à son cœur," where it would be impossible to select more ingeniously the praise which damns. As a specimen of the success with which he could play the devil's advocate, nothing perhaps can surpass a criticism of Voltaire reported by Chénedollé. Rivarol, it seems, fully admitted the excellence of the great man's lighter poems, but said, "His 'Henriade' is only a meagre

sketch, a skeleton of an epic, destitute of sinew, and flesh, and colour. His tragedies are philosophical exercises, brilliant but cold. In his style there is always something dead: while in Virgil and Racine all is alive. The 'Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations,' a paltry parody on Bossuet's immortal discourse, is only an outline, elegant enough, but dull, dry, and misleading. As for his pompously named Philosophical Dictionary, it is a book of little reach or weight in philosophy. To imagine that the thought of Voltaire cannot be surpassed is to prove one's own thought excessively limited. Nothing can be more imperfect than his manner of thinking. It is empty, superficial, tending only to mockery and dissolution, good to destroy and nothing more. There is neither depth in it, nor height, nor unity, nor *future*, nothing capable of serving as a foundation, or as a bond."

This is unfair and extravagant, no doubt, but it is remarkable how it contains in essence almost everything which has since been said against its subject. In Rivarol's terser maxims the same acuteness, the same felicity of expression, and occasionally the same suspicion of unfairness and insincerity appear. Many of these are scattered about his longer works, and among them one may often find sayings which under other guise have become well known. "Le lecteur trouve toujours la peine que l'écrivain ne s'est pas donné," is a better, if less laconic, expression of the truth whose English clothing is variously attributed. Rivarol has left, in one form or another, a considerable number of *pensées*, in which his admiration for Montesquieu and Pascal, the two authors whom he prized most, is evident enough. Some of them suffer from a frequent sin in *pensée*-writing; they are too ambitious. Thus, the following: "Flambeau de la langue et de tous les

arts, la métaphysique éclaire, indique, et ne fait pas," is little more than an ingenious conceit. But this cannot always be objected against his serious thoughts. The same metaphorical tinge is observable in another of the same class, but there is more in the metaphor: "Le temps est le rivage de l'esprit; tout passe devant lui et nous croyons que c'est lui qui passe." "The imagination is the mistress of the future" has a somewhat mystic sound, but "On n'a pas le droit d'une chose impossible" is excellent both in matter and form. Some of his political axioms are still more remarkable. "La politique est comme le Sphinx de la fable, elle dévore tous ceux qui n'expliquent pas ses énigmes" is one of those sayings which have many claimants. But the following is original enough, and, in the case of France, remarkably prophetic: "Les corps politiques recommencent sans cesse: ils ne vivent que de remèdes." When we come to the remark, "Le corps politique est comme un arbre; à mesure qu'il s'élève il a autant besoin du ciel que de la terre," it is perhaps not uncharitable to suppose that this was written when Rivarol had been, at any rate for political purposes, converted. Here, again, is a saying worthy of note: "Les souverains ne doivent jamais oublier qu'un écrivain peut recruter parmi des soldats, et qu'un général ne peut jamais recruter parmi les lecteurs"; while the following, on the other side, shows a power of recognising a fact which the contemporaries of the author forgot to their cost: "Les peuples les plus civilisés sont aussi voisins de la barbarie que le fer le plus poli l'est de la rouille." Here, again, appears the cynic: "Il faut plutôt pour opérer une révolution une certaine masse de bêtise de l'une part qu'une certaine dose de lumière de l'autre." But Rivarol did not spare his friends. He said of the Allies, "Ils ont toujours été

en arrière d'une année, d'une armée, et d'une idée," and of the nobles, "Ils prennent leurs souvenirs pour des droits." The *Lettre à la Noblesse*, written when Brunswick's victorious advent was confidently expected, is a really admirable appeal for moderation and justice in the moment of presumed victory.

His religious maxims have the air of being made to order, but fortunately there are few of them. In ethics he is more copious, and on both these subjects his chief utterances are to be found in a series of letters to Necker, who was one of his chosen objects of attack. There is, however, in some of his moral sentences a fair measure of the spirit of La Rochefoucauld. "L'indulgence pour ceux qu'on connaît est bien plus rare que la pitié pour ceux qu'on ne connaît pas" is not unworthy of the great anatomist of the seventeenth century. The following, too, from the treatise *De l'Homme*, a strange mixture of dulness and vivacity, is a fine image: "Les pavots de la vieillesse s'interposent entre la vie et la mort pour nous faire oublier l'une et nous assoupir sur l'autre." In another saying, verbally good as it is, Rivarol is surely unjust towards his century. "Que pouvait faire," he asks, "le bon sens dans un siècle malade de métaphysique où l'on ne permettait plus le bonheur de se présenter sans preuves?" This is probably the only time that the eighteenth century has ever been charged with too great nicety in its admittance of things enjoyable. In dealing with literary subjects we might expect greater copiousness from a lover of letters and of language such as Rivarol, who, like Gautier and some other writers, had a genuine affection for words in themselves. His remarks on this head are valuable, but do not seem to have been preserved in any great numbers. Of these sayings on language I have already quoted one, the rather too

rhetorical remark about the probity of the French tongue. Others have to do with the question of the relation between language and thought, but there is one on grammar which deserves citation: "La grammaire étant l'art de lever les difficultés d'une langue, il ne faut pas que le levier soit plus lourd que le fardeau." There might be a disposition nowadays to dispute this definition of grammar, but hardly any one will dispute the shrewdness and the necessity of the accompanying caution. Elsewhere are to be found some comparisons between "l'esprit" and "le talent," which show that Rivarol attached a rather unusual meaning to the many-sensed word *esprit*. He seems to mean by it the understanding in its widest sense, while he gives to "talent" the equivalent, or pretty nearly the equivalent of "faculty of expression." Shorter maxims are often remarkable, such as "Le génie égorge ceux qu'il pille"; "Plus d'un écrivain est persuadé qu'il a fait penser son lecteur quand il l'a fait suer"; "Celui qui pour être naïf emprunte une phrase d'Amyot, demanderait pour être brave l'armure de Bayard." This last sally, despite its wit, shows that Rivarol was not superior to his contemporaries in his knowledge and understanding of the ancient literature of France. But perhaps the best measure of his faculty is to be found in some remarks on Shakespeare. It does not appear that these remarks were founded on any real knowledge of the poet, and Rivarol was too much a man of his time to divine fully the phenomenon which he was not able, or did not care to examine. But his view is exactly that which a man of great faculty would take of Shakespeare, from secondhand knowledge of what had been said of him by enthusiasts on the one side, and detractors on the other.

There are few anecdotes recorded of Rivarol's telling.

"Dieu de la conversation," and "Saint Georges de l'épigramme," as his admirers called him, his speech does not seem to have been that of the *raconteur*. His faculty, in short, was almost entirely critical, and he knew it so well that he abstained from any attempt at constructive work, except on the smallest scale. He was a born journalist and reviewer, and perhaps under pressure he might have made a historian. But it is difficult to imagine him either poet, dramatist, or writer of fiction. Chamfort, on the other hand, had novel-writing come into fashion in his days, might very well have anticipated Charles de Bernard, though his graver would have drawn deeper lines.

To weigh either of these men in the balance, and assign them their exact place among writers, is not very easy. As we have seen, nothing that they did of any magnitude, with a partial exception in the case of some work of Rivarol's, deserves high estimate. We are therefore forced to judge them by their maxims, independent or imbedded in larger works, by their reported conversation, and by doubtful and treacherous collections of apophthegms and anecdotes. Now *pensée*-writing, even at its best, is a kind of composition peculiarly hard to value. The paucity of words which it necessarily affects may be suggestive of much thought: on the other hand it may serve to conceal the want of any thought at all. The writer of *pensées* always and legitimately claims that his readers shall read between the lines, and sometimes it seems as if he relied a little too much on this license. There is also a vast amount of mere trick in this style of composition. Let any man of fair ability and some knack of writing spend a few days over La Rochefoucauld and Joubert, and he will find himself almost unconsciously framing sentences on their model, the goodness or badness of

which he can hardly, for the time at least, estimate. In these two writers there is scarcely any alloy, but the same can hardly be said of any other composers of maxims, and it certainly cannot be said of the two who are before us. To write *pensées* with supreme felicity there is required, either such long experience and keen observation of men as La Rochefoucauld and Chesterfield possessed, or else such familiarity with books, and such a habit of meditation, as was the equipment of Pascal and Joubert. Neither Chamfort nor Rivarol possessed either of these advantages in the highest degree. They knew men, but only from the outside, and from certain limited, superficial, and accidental points of view. They knew books too, but their knowledge was circumscribed by the fashions of a time which, whatever its other merits may have been, was a time as little favourable to literary criticism and valuation as any that the world has seen. Hence their axioms are rather personal than general, rather amusing than instructive, rather showing the acuteness and ingenuity of the authors than able to throw light on the subjects dealt with. As mere tellers of anecdotes and sayers of sharp things they have indeed had few rivals, and rich as French literature is in this class, the hundred pages or so of Chamfort's *Characters and Portraits* contain almost as much wealth as all other writers can make up between them. In this point there is no comparison between the two, and if Chamfort yields to Rivarol as a writer, as a tale-teller in miniature he has absolutely no rival.

The singular difference between the promise and the performance, the fame and the deeds of both our authors, naturally invites another consideration. How far were circumstances responsible for what they did and for what they did not do? As a rule I must confess

that this inquiry seems to me an idle one, but in this case it has its appositeness. It is difficult for any one who studies them to miss an extraordinarily nineteenth-century flavour in both. It is said, indeed, that Rivarol had conceived in his Gascon head a notion that Voltaire had done him a deadly injury by getting himself born half a century earlier, and filling the place which otherwise he, Rivarol, would have filled. To me, however, it seems that both Rivarol and his rival and enemy, Chamfort, were born not too late but too early. They had not the creative genius which enables a man to produce good and original work at any time that he may occur. They were of the second or third order, the order which simply falls in more or less with the prevalent ideas and the fashionable forms of its time. Now the literary forms and ideas of the last quarter of the eighteenth century in France must be admitted by any competent and impartial judge to have been nearly hopeless. Tragedies and comedies where every scene, almost every situation and speech, was taken from a recognised catalogue; *éloges* which simply adapted this author and that to certain specified and accepted canons; poems which were verse-exercises done to scale—these were the chief of them. No one who had not genius to break away from these, or genius to transform them, could produce literary work of the first or even of the second class. Forty or fifty years later, both would have found open to them careers for which they were admirably adapted. Rivarol's powers of style and faculty of appreciation would have made him a rival on the one side to Mérimée, on the other to Sainte-Beuve, to both of whom he bears some points of resemblance. Chamfort, with his smaller literary faculty, possessed, besides his narrative ability, a germ of political enthusiasm which might

have made him a statesman or at least a great orator, and a vein of discontented sentiment which might have produced good work of the melancholy-moralist sort. It is obvious, too, that both were above all things suited for contributing to periodical literature, the special employment of political literary men for a century past. When that literature is reviled, as it often is, for turning away spirits and talents capable of doing better work, it is only fair to reckon on the other side the good work it has produced from those who would otherwise have been more or less sterile. Chamfort and Rivarol are examples of such actual historical sterility—neither felt the vocation to produce a *magnum opus*, and to neither was the opportunity open of producing numerous interesting *opuscula*. It would lead us too far from our subject to apply the reverse method and consider the authors, both in English and in French literature, of the last hundred years who would have been equally sterile, or yet more sterile, but for the impulse and employment which these men lacked.

In what they did, however, imperfect as it may be, there is, after all, a charm and an interest which is not to be overlooked. They were among the last (for Joubert, it must be remembered, was their contemporary, born only a year or two after Rivarol, though his posthumous work appeared so much later) of a great and characteristic school of writers. Since them, with the single exception just noticed, no one has made his mark by maxim or apophthegm, and it may be doubted whether any one will do so until society and literature have again gone through some notable changes. Not destitute of serious import and value, they offer at the same time almost unequalled pasture to the merely idle mind that delights in play of words and wit. They have, too, what may be called the merit

of making an end. They were the natural outcome of a brilliant, fastidious, and enlightened society, which at last became, in matter of literature, too enlightened to dare to make a mistake, and too fastidious to risk imperfect work. Their personality is unusually vivid. Almost without the aid of biographers we can see Rivarol, with the curiously innocent smirk which his portrait wears, remarking that "Florian's works consist of nearly as many blank pages as printed ones. It is lucky, too," he adds, "for the blank pages are far the best." We can hear Chamfort, in a brilliant society, recounting the misfortunes of his colleague, who, in the words of the ballad, "came home at e'en, and found a man where no man should be." He tells how the culprit, in the true spirit of his father Adam, upbraids his partner in the misdeed: "Quand je vous disais, madame, qu'il était temps que je m'en aille!" "Que je m'en *allasse*, monsieur," cries the scandalised academician, his feelings as a husband vanishing before his sensitiveness as a grammarian. Their works exactly give the two men. Rivarol, a man of indifferent breeding, of little delicacy, of few illusions, keenly alive to the main chance, and possessing a gladiatorial faculty of fighting on this side or on that, but of fine though intolerant literary taste, and of unexampled powers of malign epigram. Chamfort, thoroughly versed in the ways of society, though not born to it, prone to throw his thought into anecdote rather than reflection, tired of the world and yet anxious to keep in with it and suit its tastes, scornful of his fellows and yet entertaining at heart almost fantastic views of the possibilities of human progress, and of the abstract rights of humanity.

IV

SAINT-ÉVREMOND [1879]

It is recorded that Archbishop Turpin once appeared in a dream to a trouvère named Nicolas of Padua, and enjoined upon him, for the health of his soul, to put the veracious *Chronique* into verse. This Nicolas proceeded to do, and in order to make the matter sure, extended his version to some twenty thousand lines. On this, M. Léon Gautier, who tells the story, and who, though a pious Catholic, is a Frenchman, remarks, not unnaturally, "Le ciel se gagnait alors bien laborieusement." It is at any rate certain that a good many French authors would, on such terms, have but little chance of any heaven, literary or other; and of hardly any French writer is this truer than of the famous courtier, wit, and freethinker, whose name stands at the head of this page. As a writer, Saint-Évremond, though one of the least voluminous of his kind considering the numerous forms he tried, had once a commanding reputation and influence. The piratical booksellers of the end of the seventeenth century are said to have more frequently ordered "du Saint-Évremond" from their hacks than any other compound, and to this day it is sometimes difficult to separate accurately the false work from the true in what is attributed to him. Although Voltaire was not too just to his forerunner, the popular estimate of the relation in which the two stand to one another is sufficiently accurate. With Pascal and Bayle, Saint-Évremond constitutes the immediate literary ancestry of the author of *Candide*, and perhaps displays more

of the special characteristics of his descendant than either of the other two. Yet it would probably be difficult, even for those who have more knowledge of French literature than the average Englishman possesses, to name many of Saint-Évremond's works, much more to give an account of them. For Englishmen, however, Saint-Évremond has some special interest. He lived for nearly half his long life amongst us, and, unlike some other refugees, he had a decided love for our nation. He was the first Frenchman of distinction to give anything like a rational or critical account of any portion of English literature. Besides all this, and notwithstanding the fact that he was a Frenchman of Frenchmen, he had a strongly English vein in his composition, and serves as a link to explain the close connection that for some half-century at least existed between English and French *belles-lettres*, a connection which was by no means a matter of mere court influence or fashion.

Charles [de] Marguetel de Saint-Denis was born at Saint-Denis-le-Guast, near Coutances, on the 1st of April 1610, and died at London on the 20th of September 1703. Men of letters in France in the seventeenth century, who were also men of rank, had a curious habit of living to the most surprising ages, and Saint-Évremond, like Fontenelle and Saint-Aulaire, was almost a centenarian. His family was a good one, allied to the best houses of Normandy, his father was fairly wealthy, and his designation was taken from one of the family estates; but he himself was the third of seven children, and his portion was modest, though sufficient for the time. At no period during his life was he wealthy, and it is only fair to remember that, in his time, almost any man who had birth, brains, and a good address could obtain wealth if he chose. When

he was nine years old he was sent to Paris, and entered at that famous school which, under the successive names of Collège de Clermont, Collège Louis le Grand, and Lycée Louis le Grand, has educated so many of the greatest men of France. Like several other pupils of the Jesuits, Saint-Évremond requited the pains of his instructors with not very welcome *θρέπτρα*, but for his special master, the Père Canaye, he seems to have entertained affection, and the raillery with which he treats him in a notable Conversation is good-humoured enough. After four or five years of school he returned to Normandy, and studied philosophy at Caen, whence he was moved to the Collège d'Harcourt. Destined for the law, he worked for some time at it, but soon took to a more congenial occupation, accompanying Bassompierre and Créqui on the Italian expedition of 1629-1632. After this, the Thirty Years' War gave him abundant occupation in the North, and he served for several years in the Netherlands and on the Rhine, the comfortable system of winter-quarters permitting him plenty of opportunities both of study and society. In 1639 he made the acquaintance of Gassendi, and learnt from the great Neo-Epicurean the doctrines which coloured all the rest of his life and work. He was present at the siege of Arras, at Rocroi, Fribourg, and Nordlingen (in the last of which fights he was severely wounded), at the capture of Dunkirk, at the battle of Lens. This gave him something like twenty years of foreign service, and he afterwards took a part in the intestine disturbances of the Fronde. For many years he was a favourite and constant companion of Condé, but some real or reported slips of his sharp tongue angered the great leader, and Saint-Évremond lost his favour. During the Fronde he adhered steadily to the Royalist side, which he aided not merely with

his sword, but with a satire on the Norman partisans of the Duke de Longueville. Under his friend, the Duke de Candale, he enjoyed some employments in Guienne, by which he succeeded in amassing, during the space of two years and a half, the sum of fifty thousand livres, a considerable amount for the time, though there does not seem to be any evidence to show that he abused his opportunities. Among his other friends was the common friend of all men of letters, Fouquet, and it was this acquaintance which was at any rate the occasional cause of his disgrace. On Fouquet's downfall he accompanied Louis XIV to Brittany. But he left behind him, in the care of the superintendent's friend, Madame de Bellière, a case of papers, which fell into the hands of Colbert, as the result of a domiciliary visitation to which the lady was subjected. The case contained a copy of the "Letter on the Peace of the Pyrenees," in which that arrangement was very sharply criticised. Colbert, as usual, did not lose the opportunity of crushing a friend of his rival, and little was wanted to rouse the susceptible vanity of Louis. Warned of danger, Saint-Évremond for a time wandered about the provinces, thinking that the storm might blow over; but it did not, and he finally made his way to England.

Here he was welcomed with open arms by the King, by courtiers of the stamp of Buckingham and Rochester, and by literary men, such as Waller and Hobbes. Charles gave him a pension of three hundred a year, which was probably paid, inasmuch as long afterwards we find Saint-Évremond eulogising the place of his exile as one "where guineas were plentiful, and where there was full liberty to spend them." In 1665, the Plague year, he retired to Holland, and stayed there for some time; but England was much more to his

taste, and he returned to our shores after a year or two, nor did he ever afterwards quit them. Soon, too, he had an additional tie to the country. Hortense Mancini, Duchess Mazarin, tired of battling with her half-lunatic husband, came to England, and Saint-Évremond at once established himself as her mentor, lover, and satirist, all in one. His influence undoubtedly had not a little to do with the formation of her *salon*, and with its reputation for wit and easy living. In the early days of his exile he had, through the Count de Lionne and others, made some overtures for his recall. There is, however, a sarcastic flavour about his apologies which Louis, who was no dullard, may very possibly have perceived; and besides, it seems probable that Saint-Évremond's free-thinking (though of a very decent, moderate, and unaggressive type) was made to work against him by the King's spiritual advisers. However this may be, no recall was granted, and by degrees Saint-Évremond ceased to desire any; so much so that at length, when, after the English Revolution, a restoration to favour was offered him, he declined it. The Revolution itself made no difference to him. William, whom he had early known and admired in Holland, regarded him with quite as much favour as the Stuarts, and the society of England suited him far better than the new faces and other minds of Versailles could possibly have done. The death of his Hortense in 1699 was doubtless a blow to him; but he survived her as well as William and most of his early friends, dying in 1703 at the age of ninety-three. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, and the soil of Albion, which had certainly not been perfidious to him, still holds his bones. His bust and tablet may be seen in Poets' Corner, immediately to the right of Prior's monument, and above that of Sharp.

It was in England, and at the extreme end of his life, that the first and only authoritative collection of his works was made. He had long refused to publish, and most of his productions circulated, if they circulated at all, in manuscript. Like all his contemporaries, however, he suffered from pirates, and not unfrequently had "works" of his submitted to him, which did not contain a single line of his writing. At last he took counsel of a well-known man of letters, Des Maizeaux, and put into his hands what he supposed to be the whole of his work. But he seems to have admitted that his memory might in some cases play him false, and advantage of this was taken after his death to begin once more the attribution of spurious books. Saint-Évremond has more than once undergone the process of selection which he both needs and deserves. The most recent of these selections are a volume of the Collection Didot edited by M. Hippeau, another edited by M. Gidel for MM. Garnier, and a better printed and more ambitious one by M. Charles Giraud¹. The last mentioned contains a huge biographical introduction which takes some four hundred pages to reach the date of its hero's exile, and seems to have been regarded by its author as a sort of waste-pipe for relieving himself of his miscellaneous knowledge of the period².

Saint-Évremond's literary attempts did not begin till he had already reached middle life, and till the Thirty Years' War was drawing to a close. I have said that in the intervals of his campaigns he devoted himself to society in Paris. That society was in the full swing of the literary fashion which the starting of the

¹ All these, or at least the preliminary essays to them, were, I believe, the result of the setting of Saint-Évremond as an Academy Prize subject in 1866. The use of these prizes has sometimes been questioned in England; but here the practice seems justified.

² There are many curious notices of M. Giraud, who was one of the *grex* of the Princess Mathilde, in the *Journal des Goncourt*.

Academy and the formation of the Rambouillet and other coteries called forth. Almost the earliest work that came from Saint-Évremond's pen was the *Comédie des Académistes*, a satire on the Immortals which was attributed to more than one of their own body. From that time until his death, nearly sixty years afterwards, it was rare for any considerable time to elapse without his writing something. These productions were invariably of the occasional order. One of the peculiarities of the time was its affection for particular literary forms in which the wits of the period could vie with one another. Such were the famous sonnets of the Uranistes and Jobistes; such the short historic sketches of striking events of which Sarrasin and Retz set the example; such, later, the fairy tales in which mobs of gentlemen and ladies who wrote with more or less ease vainly endeavoured to rival Hamilton and Perrault. There were, however, certain styles which were peculiarly popular, which were specially well suited for this class of composition, and which have resulted, rather surprisingly, in the production of some of the masterpieces of the world's literature. Such are the *Pensée*, the *Maxim*, the *Portrait*, the *Conversation*. Saint-Évremond did not much affect the shorter forms in which his great contemporaries, Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, were to obtain imperishable renown. But his *Characters*, his *Portraits*, and his *Conversations* are among the very best of their kind. The moralising tendency, of which Montaigne had set the fashion, was never stronger than in him, and he showed it in almost every production of his pen. In the art of tale-telling he had a singular skill, and his short history of the Irish *illuminé*, Valentine Greatrakes, strikes one, as do many of his other writings, with a curious sense of modernness as compared with most of the literature of the period. At

all times he was greatly given to professed moralising on religious and philosophical matters, and he has left not a few *Pensées*, *Reflections*, and *Discours*, dealing directly with religion. History, however, and public business were far from being neglected by one who had in his time been an active soldier and politician. His "Letter on the Peace of the Pyrenees" is, as I have said, the most authentic cause assigned for his disgrace, and his longest and most regular work consists of reflections on the character of the Romans at different times of their history. The historical and moralising spirit unites with that of literary criticism in some papers on the captains of his time,—Turenne, Condé, Beaufort,—and on some of those of antiquity, as well as on the historians, ancient and modern, who had dealt with them.

A considerable part of his work consists of almost purely literary criticism; tinged, it is true, by an infusion of the moralising of which Saint-Évremond rarely divests himself wholly. He was, like Madame de Sévigné and others of the brightest wits of the time, a staunch supporter of Corneille against the rising popularity of Racine; and his parallel of the latter's *Alexandre* with Corneille's work drew from the older dramatist a warm acknowledgment. Drama, not merely French, but Spanish, Italian, and English, came in for much of his attention, and he has also left a large number of critical discourses in the taste of the time (a taste which perhaps might be revived without much harm) for dealing with more abstract literary questions. Like all his contemporaries he dabbled in poetry, and I fear I cannot say that his dabblings were more successful or more productive than was the case with most of those contemporaries. Last, but not least, comes to be mentioned his correspondence, in which

many of his best things occur. Like much other correspondence of the time, it was intended to be at least semi-public, and we find him alluding to expressions of his own in letters which had evidently got abroad and had become the subjects of general comment. Nor was his early legal education entirely without result in the work of his later life, and it may have stood him in some stead when he composed for his beloved Hortense Mancini a formal reply to the formal complaint of her doubtless sorely tried but almost equally trying husband.

The *Conversation du Maréchal d'Hocquincourt avec le Père Canaye* is fortunately short enough to be given here in full, with some slight necessary omissions. It needs no prelude except to say that the scene is laid in the middle of the Fronde, that Canaye was Saint-Évremond's tutor at the Collège de Clermont, and that Hocquincourt was a typical French noble of the time and a lover of the famous Madame de Montbazon.

I was dining one day with Marshal d'Hocquincourt at Peronne, when Father Canaye, who was of the party, turned the conversation by degrees upon the submission of reason which religion asks from us. He told us of some brand-new miracles and some entirely modern revelations, and ended by observing that the plague was not more to be shunned than those freethinkers who wish to examine everything by the light of reason.

"Who talks about freethinkers?" said the marshal; "nobody knows them better than I do. Bardouville and Saint-Ibal¹ were my particular friends, and, indeed, 'twas they who drew me over to the side of M. de Soissons against Richelieu. Do I know the freethinkers? Why I could write a book about them and their speeches. When Bardouville died, and Saint-Ibal went to Holland, I made friends with La Frette and Sauvebœuf, who were not exactly geniuses, but very good fellows. La Frette was a capital companion, and a great friend of mine. I think I showed my friendship in his last illness. I saw him dying of low fever like an old woman, and it made me quite mad to think that La Frette, who had fought with the greatest fire-eaters of the time, was going out like a candle. Both of us, Sauvebœuf and myself, were anxious

¹ Information about these worthies may be found by any one who wants it in Tallemant des Réaux.

to keep up our friend's character, and I made up my mind to blow his brains out that he might die like a man. I was just putting the pistol to his forehead when a rascally Jesuit who was there struck up my arm and spoilt the shot. It vexed me so that I became a Jansenist at once."

"Ah, monseigneur," said Father Canaye, "observe how constantly Satan is on the watch, and how he goes about seeking whom he may devour! You take a trifling grudge against our society, and he improves the occasion to surprise and devour you. Nay, he does worse than devour you, he makes a Jansenist of you. Oh! let us be watchful. It is impossible to be too watchful against the enemy of the human race."

"The father is quite right," said the marshal. "I have been told that the devil never sleeps, and one must meet him on his own terms and keep on the alert. But never mind the devil, let us talk of ourselves. For my part I used to love war above all things, after war Madame de Montbazon, and after Madame de Montbazon philosophy."

"It is reasonable," said the father, "that you should love war, monseigneur, for war loves you, and has loaded you with honours. Do you know that I too am a man of war? The King has made me hospital chaplain in his army of Flanders; is not that being a man of war? Who would ever have believed that Father Canaye would become a soldier? I am one, monseigneur, and I find that I do God just as much service in the camp as I used to do Him at the Collège de Clermont. There is, therefore, no harm in your loving war. To go to war is to serve one's king, and to serve one's king is to serve God. But as for Madame de Montbazon, if you regarded her with eyes of concupiscence, I hope you will excuse my remarking that your wishes were culpable. I am sure, monseigneur, that you did not. You loved her with an innocent affection."

"What, father! do you want to make me out a fool? I can assure you that Marshal d'Hocquincourt has been taught better than that. I meant, father, I meant——. You know quite well what I meant."

"Fie! fie! monseigneur; what do you mean by 'I meant'? Our good fathers would be quite shocked at that 'I meant.' But you are joking. When one is an old soldier one becomes accustomed to all sorts of ways of talking. Well! well! as I said, you are joking."

"Not in the least, my good sir," said the marshal. "Do you know how much I loved her?"

"*Usque ad aras*, no doubt, monseigneur."

"I don't know about *aras*, father. But look here," said the marshal, taking up a knife, and gripping the handle very hard, "if she had told me to kill you, this knife would be deep in your heart at this moment."

Now the good father was shocked at the tone of this conversation, and still more at the marshal's excitement. He had recourse to secret prayer, and prayed very heartily to be delivered from his

state of peril. But as he was not entirely confident of the success of this method, he kept shuffling away from the marshal by a gentle process of movement on his seat. The marshal followed him in exactly the same way, and as he kept the knife raised, one really might have thought that he was going to carry out his idea. Natural malice made me enjoy his reverence's alarm for a moment, but at last I became afraid that the marshal in his transport might turn jest into earnest, and so I reminded him that, Madame de Montbazon being dead, there was, fortunately, no danger of peril from her to Father Canaye.

"Ah, yes," said the marshal, "heaven does all for the best. The loveliest of all women was beginning to look askance on me. She had a little wretch of an Abbé de Rancé¹ always about her, a miserable little Jansenist, who talked to her in public about grace, and in private about very different subjects. That made me break with the Jansenists. Before that I used not to lose a single sermon that Desmares preached, and I swore by all the Port Royal people. Since then I have always had a Jesuit as a confessor, and if my son has sons I will have them educated at the Collège de Clermont on pain of being cut off with a shilling."

"Oh, how admirable are the ways of Providence!" cried Father Canaye. "How deep are the secrets of its policy! A little Jansenist dandy admires a lady of whom monseigneur is fond, and a merciful Providence avails itself of the spirit of jealousy to restore monseigneur to the fold. Wonderful, indeed, are its judgments!"

As soon as the good father had finished these pious reflections, I thought that I might as well say something, and I asked the marshal whether he had not said that philosophy had succeeded Madame de Montbazon in his affections.

"Philosophy²! I should think so!" he said. "I have been only too fond of it. But I have got clear of it now, and I shall not go back. There was a deuce of a fellow who so muddled my brains by talking of our first parents and apples and serpents and cherubims and paradises that really I was within an ace of believing nothing at all; in fact, I didn't believe anything at all, hang me if I did. But now I am ready to go to the stake for religion's sake. It isn't that I see the sense of it; on the contrary, I see less sense than ever. But still I would go to the stake for it without knowing why, and that is all I can tell you."

"So much the better, monseigneur," said the father in a tone slightly nasal, but very devout, "so much the better. This is not the doing of man, but of God. 'I see no sense in it.' That is true religion, that is. 'No sense in it!' How gracious Providence has

¹ The legend about Rancé, his discovery of the headless corpse of his mistress, and the consequent founding of La Trappe is famous. It may be doubtful as history, but is far too good to give up as romance.

² It may be just necessary to remind the reader that *philosophie* already had acquired the meaning (which in the next century became famous) of scepticism in religious matters.

been to you, monseigneur! We are told to be as little children. Children are innocent; and why? because they have not got any sense. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they do not sin.' Why? Because they have no reason. 'I don't see any sense in it.' 'I can't tell you why.' 'I don't know why.' What beautiful words! They ought to be written in letters of gold. 'It is not that I see any sense in it; on the contrary, less than ever.' Certainly this is the work of heaven, for those at least who know how to appreciate heavenly things. 'No sense in it.' How gracious Providence has been to you!"

It is possible that the father would have pushed his holy detestation of sense and reason still farther, but at this moment letters were brought to the marshal from the Court, which put an end to the edifying discourse. The marshal read his letters to himself, and when he had done so he was good enough to communicate their contents to the company. "If I wished to play the politician," said he, "like some people, I should go into my study to read my dispatches, but I always act and speak openly. The cardinal tells me that Stenay is taken, that the Court will be here in a week, and that I am to have the command of the besieging army to go and relieve Arras with Turenne and La Ferté. I have not forgotten that Turenne let M. le Prince beat me when the Court was at Gien; perhaps I shall have a chance of paying him back in the same coin. If Arras could be relieved and Turenne beaten it would exactly suit me. I'll do my best towards it, and I say no more." He would doubtless have told us all the circumstances of his battle and his grievance against Turenne, but news was brought that the convoy was already at some distance from the town, so that we had to take leave somewhat earlier than we should otherwise have done.

Father Canaye, who had no mount, asked for one to take him to the camp. "And what sort of a horse would you like?" said the marshal.

"I shall answer you, monseigneur, as the good Father Suarez answered the Duke of Medina Sidonia in like case, '*Qualem me decet esse; mansuetum.*' A gentle and peaceable beast, such as I ought to be myself."

"I know something of your Latin," said the marshal. "*Mansuetum!* That would suit a sheep better than a horse. Give my own horse to the father; I love his order and himself. Give him my good horse."

I dispatched my business, and shortly rejoined the convoy. We got safely through, but not without some fatigue to Father Canaye. I met him during the march on M. d'Hocquincourt's good horse—a lively beast, never still, always champing his bit, shying and neighing after every horse he met, to the father's great dismay. "Why, father," said I, as I came up to him, "is that a mount in the style of Suarez?"

"Ah, sir," he began, "I am quite worn out; I can't stand it any longer." But at that moment we put up a hare. At once a hundred

horsemen left the ranks to gallop after her, and there were pistol-shots fired enough for a respectable skirmish. The father's horse, well accustomed to fire, ran away with him, and made him in a minute outstrip all the hunters. It was pleasant to see a Jesuit showing the way to the field without the least intention of doing so. Luckily the hare was soon killed, and I found the father in the midst of a score of troopers, who were congratulating him on being in at the death, after a run which really might be called a providential interposition.

He received their politeness with a good grace, and in his heart he began quite to despise Suarez' *mansuetum caballum*, and thought not a little of himself for the excellent figure he flattered himself he had cut upon the marshal's thoroughbred. But he soon had occasion to remember that fine saying of Solomon, *Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*. As he grew cool he felt a pain to which excitement had hitherto rendered him insensible, and vainglory giving place to real anguish, he regretted the repose of his society and the sweets of the peaceful life he had quitted. But his meditations were useless. The camp had to be reached, and he was so tired of his steed that I could see he was quite ready to leave Bucephalus to his own devices, and head the infantry on foot.

I consoled him for his woes, and partly cured them by giving him the most easy-going animal that he could possibly have desired. He thanked me a thousand times, and was so sensible of my courtesy that, forgetting his cloth, he talked to me more like a frank and open-hearted man than a wary Jesuit. I asked him what he thought of M. d'Hocquincourt. "He is an excellent gentleman," he said; "indeed, a precious soul. He has left the Jansenists, and we are much obliged to him; but, for my part, I shall not sit next him again at table, and I shall never borrow another horse of him." Satisfied with this first confidence, I thought I would try to draw him out further. "What," said I, "is the origin of the terrible enmity between you and the Jansenists? Is it really due to a difference of opinions about grace?" "That would be absurd," he answered. "It is folly to think that our mutual hatred is due to divergence of opinion on such a point. Neither grace nor the Five Propositions have really set us by the ears. It is all due to rivalry in the direction of consciences. The Jansenists found us in possession of the confessional, and wished to drive us out. To do so they adopted a plan of action diametrically opposite to ours. We use gentleness and indulgence, they affect austerity and rigour. We soothe souls by pointing out God's mercy, they startle them by dwelling on His justice. They apply fear while we use hope, and try to subdue where we try to attract. We both of us wish to save souls, but each wishes to have the credit of the process; and, to be plain with you, the interests of the director generally take precedence of the salvation of the penitent. I am speaking to you in a way very different from that in which I spoke to the marshal. With him I was simply the Jesuit, with you I use the openness of a soldier."

I complimented him very much on the changed sentiments with which his new profession had inspired him, and he appeared to like the compliment. I might have gone on longer, but as night approached we had to part, the father apparently as much pleased with me as I was amused at him.

I am much mistaken if the modernness of this does not strike most readers in a work which dates from 1656. Of the same year, and almost more surprising, is the following charming argument on the question "Whether a Catholic or a Protestant makes the best wife?"

You tell me that you are in love with a girl who is a Protestant, and that, were it not for the difference of religion, you think you could make up your mind to marry her. If you are so minded that you cannot bear the idea of being separated from your wife in the next world, I should advise you to marry a Catholic. But if I were a marrying man, I think I should prefer a lady of a religion different to mine. I should be afraid that a Catholic, being sure of her husband's society in the next life, might, perhaps, take a fancy to the society of a lover in this. I have an idea, too, which is not a common one, but in the truth of which I am disposed to believe. It is that the reformed religion is as favourable to husbands as the Catholic faith is advantageous to lovers. The Christian liberty of which Protestants boast tends to form a certain spirit of resistance, which helps women to defend themselves from the insidious approaches of a gallant. On the other hand, the submission which Catholicity demands predisposes them to allow themselves to be conquered. And, indeed, a soul which can resign itself under persuasion to what is unpleasant ought not to make much difficulty in yielding to what is delightful. The reformed religion seeks only to establish regularity of conduct, and regularity easily becomes virtue. Catholicism makes women much more devout, and devotion easily becomes love. The one, again, teaches only abstinence from what is forbidden. The other, which admits the virtue of good works, allows its votaries to commit some trifling acts from which they are told to abstain, at the price of doing a good deal of good which they are not strictly enjoined to perform. Protestant chapels, moreover, are a great safeguard to husbands, while Catholic churches are the reverse. There are objects in our sacred buildings which only too often inspire amorous sentiments. In a picture of the Magdalen, old ladies may take her repentance as expressing the austerity of her life; young ones will take it for a trance of swooning passion; and while the former may think chiefly of the saint, the latter are likely to find considerable matter for meditation in the history of the sinner....

"I shall be safe then," you will say, "if I marry a Protestant."

I shall answer in the words of the excellent Father Hippothadée to Panurge, "Yes, if it please God." A wise man leaves this matter to Providence, expecting from it safety, and from himself, in any case, equanimity.

For a third and still shorter example we may take the portrait of the Duke de Candale. It will, I think, bear comparison even with the best of such things, of which it is hardly necessary to say the century produced, both in France and England, masterpieces that have never been surpassed or equalled:

As M. de Candale made a sufficient figure in the world to leave behind some curiosity as to his character, it may not be amiss to give a regular description of it. I have known few people who had so many discordant characteristics. But he had one great advantage in his intercourse with other men. Nature had prominently exposed all his amiable traits, and had hidden those which might have proved repulsive in the recesses of his heart. I never saw a mien more impressive than his. All his personal characteristics were amiable, and he made the most of parts which were of no extraordinary merit, so as to be an agreeable companion. A slight acquaintance produced a liking for him. A thorough intimacy could not be long kept up without exciting disgust, since he was little careful to preserve your friendship, and very capricious in the display of his own.

As he was thus careless of his friends, men of sense effected their retreat from his society without making any outcry, and reduced the connection to mere acquaintanceship: but sentimental persons would often complain of him as of a faithless mistress, from whom they could not tear themselves. Thus his personal charms kept him up in spite of his defects, and found a lingering tenderness even in justly irritated souls. For his own part, he lived with his friends as ladies are wont to do with their lovers. Whatever service you might have done him, he ceased to like you when you ceased to please, being easily sated with a long-standing intimacy, and as fully alive to the charms of a new friendship as are the other sex to the exquisite tenderness of a dawning passion. For all this he would let his old ties stand without attempting to break them; and he would have been a little annoyed at a violent rupture on your part, such a thing having a sort of roughness about it which did not suit his temper. Besides, he did not like to exclude the possibility of a *redintegratio amoris*, should you once more render yourself agreeable or useful to him. As he was a lover of pleasure and a man of business, keenly alive to his own interest, he came back to you for any amusement you could offer him, and would even seek you if you could do him a service. He was at once avaricious and prodigal; fond of the show which could be made by expense,

but grudging the expense which was necessary for show. He was vain, yet not unaccommodating; selfish, yet not treacherous; qualities which found themselves strangely assorted in the same person. It would have been very disagreeable to him to deceive you, and when his interest (which was the usual guide of his actions) made him break his word, he was ashamed of having broken it, and dissatisfied with himself until you had forgotten his offence. Then his affection for you rekindled, and he felt a secret obligation to you for having set him at ease with himself. Unless it was his interest to do so he rarely disobliged you, but you received as little good from his friendship as harm from his enmity; and between friends it is, perhaps, a subject of complaint to be obliged only for the evil which has not been done.

There are some points in this to which, I think, Swift was not unindebted in the most famous specimen of this kind of literature that we have in English—the character of Wharton. But it still more closely resembles in germ a weighty and most melancholy remark of Hobbes, for whom, as was natural, Saint-Évremond had a great admiration. “For the most part,” says the sage of Malmesbury, in words which ought to be written in letters of iron over the door of any temple of Friendship or of Love, “they have much better fortune in love whose hopes are built upon something in their person than those that trust to their expressions and service; and they that care less than they that care more; which not perceiving, many men cast away their services as one arrow after another, till in the end, together with their hopes, they lose their wits.” If we may trust Saint-Évremond, the Duke de Candale’s friends, of whom the satirist himself was one, must have had occasion to meditate upon this.

One more extract of a very different kind will show the practical side of Saint-Évremond’s epicureanism. He had, before his exile, a great reputation both as gourmand and gourmet, and belonged to a sort of informal society called “Les Côteaux,” from their curious judgment in vintages. His friend, the Count

d'Olonne (husband of a still greater friend), had fallen into one of those disgraces which were so frequent at the French court, and had had to retire to his estates. Saint-Évremond, an experienced exile, writes him a consolation. He begins by recommending books, especially Lucian, Petronius (for whom he had a somewhat disproportionate but easily explicable admiration), and *Don Quixote*, and then he passes to the root of the matter. It is only fair to premise, as a reminder, that Dom Pérignon had not yet made the wines of Champagne effervesce, and that the heresy (a most undoubted heresy) as to Burgundy was afterwards recanted:

Adjust, as far as you can, your tastes to your health. It is a great secret to know how to marry the agreeable to the necessary in a matter where they are generally opposed. To attain this great secret, however, nothing is necessary but temperance and nicety. And what trouble ought one to grudge in order to learn how to eat delightfully at meals—a thing which keeps body and mind in good order for all our other hours? A man may be temperate without being nice, but he cannot be nice without being temperate. Happy he who has both qualifications, for then his diet and his desires agree.

Spare no trouble to provide yourself with champagne, were you two hundred leagues from Paris. Burgundy has lost all its credit with people of taste, and even the dealers only succeed in keeping up a remnant of its old reputation. No province gives us such excellent wines for all seasons as Champagne, which supplies Ay, Avenay, and Haut Villiers till spring, and Tassy, Sillery, and Verzenay for the rest of the year. If you ask me which I like best of all wines, without attending to fashion, I shall tell you that Ay is the most natural of all—the wholesomest, the most free from earthy taste, the most delicate, in virtue of its peculiar peach flavour, and to my fancy the first of wines. Leo X, Charles V, François I, and Henry VIII used each to keep a house at or near Ay, in order to make up their stocks of it more carefully, and amid all the weighty affairs which these great princes had to supply themselves with, Ay was not the least of their cares.

Do not be curious in out-of-the-way meats, but prefer those which are easily procured. A very simple broth, neither too much nor too little done, should form the basis of every meal, as well for the cleanness of its taste as for its supporting qualities. Tender, juicy mutton, well-fed veal, white and delicate poultry, which

has been fed but not crammed, fresh-caught quails, pheasants, partridges, rabbits, each with its proper flavour, are the meats which, season by season, should furnish your table. The moor-hen is excellent and to be well spoken of, but too rare where you are and where I am to be recommended. If an indispensable necessity makes you dine with some of your neighbours who have escaped the conscription by money or good luck, compliment them on their hares, their venison, and their wild boar, but be careful not to touch either, and let the same rule guide you as to ducks, and, I had almost said, teal. Of all brown meats let the snipe alone be saved by its flavour, though at some small cost to health.

Regard all cook's mixtures, such as ragoûts and hors d'œuvres, as a variety of poison. If you eat a little of them, they will do you only a little harm; if you eat much, the pepper, the vinegar, and the onions will surely spoil your taste, and in the end affect your health. Simple condiments which you apply yourself can do no harm. Salt and orange-juice are the best and most natural seasonings. Mixed herbs are more wholesome and better flavoured than spices, but they are not universally applicable. They must be employed with discernment, and so adjusted that they bring out the proper taste of the food without making their own flavour evident.

These practical and minute instructions, which perhaps contain as sound a theory of cookery as has ever been put on paper, are completed by some equally practical hints on "the rule of not too much," by some remarks on *ce qui regarde l'amour*, and even by some counsels on religious matters, so that M. d'Olonne had the whole duty of man put before him in a letter of some half-score pages. Perhaps parts of this letter might seem undignified to transcendental persons; but one may venture a guess that Saint-Évremond's attention to these matters had not a little to do with his ninety-three years.

In making these translations I have thought it well to show chiefly the lighter side of Saint-Évremond's style and talents. But for this there are some other pieces which would perhaps have given a higher if not a truer idea of him. Such are, for instance, his admirable *Thoughts on French Tragedies*, a piece of criticism which for a contemporary of Boileau is

altogether astonishing in the justness of its sentiments and principles. The same may be said of his strictures on the French historians of his time, and of his observations on Italian Opera, which contain the substance, and are probably the source, of all that Addison and Chesterfield—the latter our English Saint-Évremond—with many others since their time, have said about that singular growth. I do not hesitate to place these three pieces of criticism above anything of the kind which was written before the middle of the eighteenth century; while the views which they express hardly obtained general currency till the beginning of the nineteenth. Saint-Évremond is the best exponent of *goût* that I know. His fastidious liking for delicacy and refinement might have been thought to predispose him towards an unhesitating adoption of the extreme academic system of French criticism, with its rigid adherence to rule, its *doucereuse* tragedy, and its comedy formed on a plan for which even Molière was too lawless and farcical. Yet the native literary sense of the man, and his early associations with writers of the vigorous stamp of Théophile and Saint-Amand, kept him clear of these errors. His admiration of Corneille is as hearty, and at the same time as discerning, as admiration can well be, and towards Molière, though he is less enthusiastic, he is equally clear-sighted. But it is obvious that, while admitting his great merits, he could not like Racine. He had a great admiration for Ben Jonson, which, however, he probably took at second-hand from Waller, for his knowledge of English does not seem to have been quite equal to the appreciation of such intensely idiomatic work as *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Silent Woman*.

In his judgments of ancient literature he is, like most men of his century, better worth hearing on Latin

authors than on Greek. He has in especial some uncomplimentary remarks on Lucian, which are rather incomprehensible. But his comments on Virgil are not to be slighted, though they will scarcely satisfy the most ardent admirers of the Mantuan. Saint-Évremond, like other people since his time, evidently had some difficulty in refraining from looking at Virgil as at an Augustan *doucereux*. I may conclude these observations on his literary studies by noticing a very curious piece of verbal criticism on the word *vaste*. Saint-Évremond, whose taste in language was unerring, very properly objected to the use of this term as a mere synonym for "great," and pointed out that its connotation includes the idea of desolation, wildness, or sterility, thus making the phrase *esprit vaste* by no means an unmixed compliment. His friend the Abbé and historian, Saint-Réal, submitted this point to the Academy, and received from that courtly body, as might have been expected, an opinion adverse to that of the man on whom the sun of Marly was not shining. The dissertation in question is a half-satirical, half-serious rejoinder. It contains some very acute literary argument, followed by a historical survey of the persons to whom the term *esprit vaste* might be applied. Finally, there comes (at least in the first draft, for Saint-Évremond cancelled it later) the following characteristic attack:

Come, gentlemen, would you yourselves have laboured for some forty years upon the exclusion of some dozen words from our language, were it not for the just aversion you have conceived to the *esprit vaste*? Your best-famed members have grown old on the strength of translations, judiciously making it their business to submit their judgment to that of others. Could anything be more opposed to the *esprit vaste*? Would you give vent to your genius in its full force, you might have produced historians worthy of the greatness of our State. But, gentlemen, you content yourselves with publishing some neatly turned story or some polished nouvelle. You evidently take all possible precautions against the danger of

the *vaste*. Some of you dutifully imitate Horace; others are good enough to give us Greek and Roman works, done to suit the modern taste; no one gives the reins to his fancy. No doubt this is from fear of the *vaste*, wherein the just precision of your rules might run a risk of being neglected.

I am not, therefore, disturbed, gentlemen, at the judgment you have delivered. Your writings contradict your words, and your works, everlasting protests against the *vaste*, quash your decision. In fact, all that you do is so admirably characteristic of *l'esprit borné*, that no man of sense can think you sincere in your approval of *l'esprit vaste*.

This passage, which concluded with a still more unkind though perfectly just hit at Racine and Boileau by name, Saint-Évremond changed into the following, which expresses more politely but perhaps even more pointedly its essence:

Si je ne me suis pas soumis au jugement que vous avez donné, c'est que j'ai trouvé dans vos écrits une censure du *vaste* beaucoup plus fort que celle qu'on verra dans ce discours. En effet, messieurs, vous avez donné des bornes si justes à vos esprits, que vous semblez condamner vous-mêmes le mot que vous défendez.

Great as was Saint-Évremond's reputation as a critic, his social and philosophical reputation was perhaps greater. Much of his written work is intimately connected with his attitude towards society. The earliest of all, or almost the earliest, consists of some maxims of the selfish-moralist kind, treated with less conciseness and literary brilliancy than those of La Rochefoucauld, but not altogether dissimilar in sentiment. The portrait of the Duke de Candale which I have given, and some other writings of his middle life, have also a certain tinge of unamiable hardness. But after his exile his tone is generally softer. His love-letters, of which we have a fair selection, are very perfect of their kind. Those to the chief divinity of his manhood, the beautiful and hare-brained Countess d'Olonne, have a tone of bitterness about them which is sometimes almost Catullan. The correspondence

with Ninon de Lenclos is mostly of a date when both the modern Epicurus and the modern Leontium (the latter name is his own) were far advanced in years. But that with Hortense Mancini is a model in its kind, and is perhaps the only instance of an old man making love on paper to a young woman, without at the same time making himself ridiculous. The *Portrait de Madame Mazarin* is altogether rapturous, though in nothing of Saint-Évremond's is his observance of due measure more evident. The letters show him alternately coaxing and scolding the duchess out of her numerous intended follies, looking after the parrot "Pretty" and the cat "Poussy" (which, on Mr Lewis Carroll's principles, may be a compound of pussy and *poussif*, the latter not a bad name for a spoilt tabby), arranging excursions, organising dinners, and so forth. For a septuagenarian not to be fatuous under such circumstances is surely hard enough. But Saint-Évremond is never fatuous, and the rare occasions on which he is tempted to murmur "Si vieillesse pouvait" save him from the charge of frivolity, without bringing upon him any counter-charge of unmanly melancholy.

He was commonly called by his friends, especially Créqui and Grammont, *Le Philosophe*, and the appellation may suggest to any modern Plutarch of literature a pleasant parallel between the two men to whom in two following centuries it served as sobriquet. Our present subject had perhaps hardly as much right to the title as Diderot, yet it was not a misnomer in his case, nor was its application limited to the special sense which, as the *Conversation du Père Canaye* will have shown, *philosophe* had already acquired. His professedly serious work, beyond the domain of literary judgment, is not large. But what there is of it, historic or moralising, is so deeply tinged with a definite and

practical system of life-philosophy that the dye cannot escape notice. A sentence in one of his earliest writings strikes the key-note of this philosophy, which he professed to have learnt from Gassendi, but in reality seems to have formed pretty much for himself. "Fame, riches, love, and pleasure, well understood and well managed, are of great assistance in mitigating the rigour of nature and softening the miseries incidental to life. Thus wisdom has been given to us chiefly for the government of our pleasures."

To this principle he was faithful throughout his life, and the application of it threw a moralising, some would say a demoralising, cast over the attitude with which he regarded things in general. This indeed was common enough in the seventeenth century, and if men were then as likely to act merely on impulse as they are now, there was a much greater tendency to endeavour to reduce actions to some common principle. In no one was this tendency more marked than in Saint-Évremond. His own principle may have been a narrow or an erroneous one. But he carried it out persistently with regard to his own affairs, and was anxious that his friends should apply it to theirs. His philosophy was not unlike that of a bird which makes its nest of all materials that can be laid hold of and made to serve. He never gave himself trouble about anything not likely to conduce to the living of a tolerably pleasant and honourable life; and he carefully avoided the doing of anything which might prove unpleasant or dishonourable. This perpetual study of probabilities and consequences conferred upon him, in many ways, an extraordinary long-sightedness, and there are probably few writers in whose practical judgments, if we put arbitrary prejudices aside, more wisdom is to be found. It is no wonder, therefore, that

he should have hit the taste of a time which before all things preferred philosophising of a more or less practical kind, and which in Hobbes, Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Spinoza, and Leibnitz produced a group of philosophic writers such as has never been at any time surpassed. Nor must it be forgotten that the form of Saint-Évremond's writings, little as it has conduced to their ultimate fame, was singularly calculated to give them vogue. Their great literary excellence, at a time when literary excellence was first beginning to be recognised, and their adoption of the fashionable forms of the time, could not fail of this result, while on the other hand both fairly entitle their author to an important place in the history of literature. In two things at least Saint-Évremond had no superior in his day, and he may be thought even to have had some claim to originality in both. The first was the application to serious and practical subjects of the ironic method; the second was the use of this method in fashioning light essays conveying important conclusions. In the first he serves as a link between Pascal and Voltaire; in the latter as a link of perhaps still more importance between Montaigne and Addison.

Saint-Évremond's portrait drawn by himself may not improperly help to conclude this paper. It is flattering, but hardly flattered, if we may judge both from the work he has left and from the testimony of others:

He is a philosopher who keeps aloof alike from superstition and from impiety; an epicurean, whose distaste for debauchery is as strong as his appetite for pleasure; a man who has never known want, but at the same time has never enjoyed affluence. He lives in a manner which is despised by those who have everything, envied by those who have nothing, appreciated by those who make their happiness and their reason agree. In his youth he hated waste, being persuaded that property was necessary to make a long life comfortable. In his age he cares not for economy,

feeling that want is little to be feared when one has but a little time left to want in. He is grateful for the gifts of nature, and finds no fault with those of fortune; he hates crime, endures error, and pities misfortune. He does not try to find out the bad points of men in order to decry them, but he looks for their foibles in order to give himself amusement; is secretly rejoiced at the knowledge of these foibles, and would be still more pleased to make them known to others, did not his discretion forbid. Life is to his mind too short to read all sorts of books, and to load one's memory with all sorts of things at the risk of one's judgment. He devotes himself not to the most learned writings, so as to acquire knowledge, but to the most sensible, so as to strengthen his understanding. At one time he seeks the most elegant to refine his taste, at another the most amusing to refresh his spirits. As for friendship, he has more constancy than might be expected from a philosopher, and more heartiness than could be looked for even in a younger and less experienced man. As for religion, he thinks justice, charity, and trust in the goodness of God of more importance than sorrow for past offences.

In this and other utterances of Saint-Évremond's we have the whole philosophy of the *Essay on Man*, and much of that contained in other writings as dissimilar to one another as those of Temple and Addison, Shaftesbury and Steele. Nor is this at all surprising, for in England the influence which Saint-Évremond exerted was far from being merely a social influence. In passage after passage of the great Queen Anne writers, his teaching and style are discernible. *The Conduct of the Allies* shows in point of style and flavour distinct reminiscences of the *Lettre sur la Paix des Pyrénées*. His characters and portraits foreshadow more clearly than any contemporary writings the great essayists of the decade immediately succeeding his death; and his philosophy, religious and practical, was the direct and immediate ancestor of the religious and practical philosophy of Bolingbroke and Chesterfield.

It will hardly do, no doubt, to judge him from the point of view of a strict or ascetic morality. His *epistola dehortatoria* to Louise de Querouaille¹, im-

¹ Or Kéroualle as we are now told to call her.

ploring her to pause before rejecting the advances of Charles II, and thereby subjecting herself to the chances of a lifetime of futile regret, is one of the oddest topsyturvifications of noble sentiment to be anywhere found. It might be bound up as a companion to *The Court of Love*, to Carew's *Rapture*, and to the famous passage in *Aucassin et Nicolette*. But Ninon's friend and Gassendi's disciple could hardly be expected to be a votary of the cult of sorrow and self-denial. As a man, his chief claim to respect is, that he fully appreciated and obeyed the maxim in which M. Leconte de Lisle has embodied the philosophy of life:

Le faible souffre et pleure, et l'insensé s'irrite,
Mais le plus sage en rit, sachant qu'il doit mourir.

If Saint-Évremond had no great troubles to undergo, he had troubles which to many men of his time appeared crushing enough. He was never rich, he made no great figure in the world, and he fell under that displeasure of kings which, for the second time in history, seems to have had the singular faculty of crushing and paralysing the spirit even of men of no small merit and powers. As an exile from France and an outcast from the sunbeams of Louis's favour, Saint-Évremond permitted himself no abject entreaties or base compliances. He remained like Rotrou's saintly hero, "debout et dans son rang." As a figure in literary history he is of great importance. He produced no work of magnitude, and even of his numerous small achievements only a few letters and essays possess intrinsic merit of a very high class; but he had the great merit of being original. In him we hear the first note of the tones which were to dominate French literature for a hundred and fifty years. He displays a combination of solid sense and cultivated taste with refined

badinage and a certain independence of thought which is hardly to be met in French before him, and which, if often missed since, has at any rate been constantly aimed at. Voltaire was undoubtedly his scholar, and all the lesser lights of the eighteenth century have to acknowledge the same obligation at first or second hand. There were doubtless many things that he could not and did not do, but with these, according to the view which I venture to take of literary criticism, it is not necessary to concern ourselves. It is sufficient that what he did do is remarkable, that imitation of it has produced a large amount of literary work of high excellence, and that it stands in definite and sufficient contrast of style and manner to the work of other literary persons and periods. The list of writers of whose work as much may be said is far from being extensive, and in that list Saint-Évremond undoubtedly deserves a place of more distinction than has usually been accorded to him.

V

A FRAME OF MINIATURES¹

I. PARNY

THERE is a pleasing legend which tells how Voltaire, during that visit to Paris which was his death, laid his hands upon the head of a very youthful poet who was introduced to him with no other remark than "*mon cher Tibulle!*" There are not too many sentimental legends about the patriarch, so that this one deserves all due honour. Parny, the dear Tibullus of the story, was a considerable figure in the French literature of the end of the last century, though he is now the shadow of a shade. Fontanes, the Halifax of the First Empire, declared him to be "*le premier poète élégiaque français.*" Ginguené, a redoubtable critic, was good enough to inform his friend that "he first had made true love vocal." Châteaubriand, in the days before he was famous and ill-natured, had nothing but compliments for him. But it is to be feared that few Frenchmen and fewer Englishmen now read his elegiac triumphs, and that nobody, or next to nobody, reads the more doubtful works by which those triumphs were succeeded. The best of him is indeed to be found in a volume of selections, provided with an essay (his second on the same subject) by Sainte-Beuve. But Parny, if

¹ These six articles (not, I hope, so formidable as some other things so named) were originally written for the *Saturday Review* in 1879-80 before I became a regular contributor thereto, through the influence of my second introducer (Mr Lang had been the first), Mr Walter Pollock. The idea of combining them in this way did not occur to me till some time later. But I do not think it is a bad one, and I have sometimes thought that not a bad book might be made of a small gallery of such "frames" each containing a set of miniature articles on poets of the same language, power and kind, but all distinctly minor. I remember, however, that some distinctly serious-minded persons were shocked at such patterning of poor, and too often of naughty, butterflies on respectable walls (1924).

he is not exactly a king of men or of poets, deserves that now and then an opinion should be formed on him at first hand and from the whole of his work. That work is not, at least as it now exists, alarmingly extensive, and it has, what the work of some much greater men has not, a very distinct and often a very pleasant individuality.

Parny was one of the rather numerous contributors with whom the French colonies, not formerly productive of much political profit to the mother-country, have enriched French literature. He was born in the island of Bourbon in 1753, and died at Paris in 1814. By far the larger portion of his life was spent in old France; and his descriptions of the scenery of the Mascarene Archipelago are neither many nor particularly vivid. But his birthplace, for all that, made him what he was in literature. He was early sent to France to be educated; he took a transient fit of devotion, and then entered the army. But, while still quite young, he returned to Bourbon; and there he fell in love with a very young lady, whose literary name is Éléonore. Parny's biographers used to call her by the highly poetical title of Esther de Baïf; but modern authorities will have it that she was a Mlle Troussaille, Christian name unknown. The affair went to considerable lengths; but Parny's father refused his permission to the lovers to marry. The victim consoled himself after the manner of his kind. He wrote a volume of *Poésies érotiques*, which at once made him famous, and with which, after the manner of Mr Pendennis and other verse-makers, he afterwards incorporated much verse originally addressed to other young ladies besides Éléonore, but now transferred to her. She married another; and Parny, finally quitting Bourbon, established himself in a rustic abode near Paris, where he lived very

comfortably on his income and nursed his reputation.

This life was disturbed by the universal disturber—the Revolution. That the poet thereby ceased to be Évariste Désiré de Forges, Vicomte de Parny, and became plain Citizen Évariste Parny, does not seem to have troubled him much. But his fortune suffered from the financial confusions of the time, and at last he found himself nearly penniless. A friend in high places gave him a post, which he did not keep long; and he then took seriously to literature. The chief result was the somewhat famous *Guerre des Dieux*. In spite of what Sainte-Beuve says, it is difficult to feel much admiration for this performance. It consists of the regulation (and by this time very stale) *philosophe* ribaldry at the expense of Christianity; the wit is very easy wit, and the thing had been much better done before—putting out of sight entirely the question whether it ought ever to have been done at all. It delayed its author's admission to the Academy for some time, but probably consoled him in his pocket. As Napoleon rose Parny's circumstances improved. As has been remarked, Fontanes, the literary adviser of the Emperor, thought highly of him, and he was pensioned. About the time of the projected English invasion he produced a very wonderful work of a patriotic character. This is entitled "*Goddam! Goddam! par un French-Dog*"; and the terrific irony of the title gives only a faint idea of its remarkable contents. It is a poem in four cantos, containing an allegory of the Norman Conquest. George III appears as Harold; his sons under the not too obscure veils of Anselare, Kyor, Cambrid, etc. The Ministers demand two hundred thousand guineas wherewith to corrupt Parliament, and, on the King demurring, point out that all prices

have risen, those of Members of Parliament with the rest. The English army marches under the conduct of familiar spirits, such as

L'adroit Robbing, Cheat sa facile sœur.

Ansclarc bombards Dieppe, and valiantly defeats several French fishermen. A Duchess (of Devonshire) kisses a *savetier*—a slight variation on the English form of the legend. At last the decisive battle is fought. The hired Scotchmen behave well, but the English troops, gorged overnight with

Le lourd pudding et le sanglant rostbeef,

make a miserable show. Their few valiant chiefs—

Le pesant Thorthenthron,

Le froid Cranncraft, le triste Whirwherwhon—

are slain, all the Royal princes run away, and at last Harold, hotly pursued, and in search of an asylum, leaps the gates of Bethlehem Hospital, handsomely relinquishes his crown, and disappears with the words

J'aime les fous et je reste à Bedlam.

It would, I think, require a wide search through literature to find a parallel to this extraordinary production, written by a man of such talent as Parny's. That talent, however, was distinctly on the wane by this time. He addicted himself to the writing of epics, put forth a poem called *Les Rose-Croix*, which is quite unreadable, and occupied himself towards the close of his life with two still longer poems of a less respectable nature. The first was entitled *Les Amours des Reines de France*, and he wisely burnt it. The other was an extension of the *Guerre des Dieux* into a *Christianide*, the manuscript of which is said to have been bought by the Restoration Government, careful of the morals and religion of its subjects, for thirty thousand francs. Can anybody name a European Government in the

present day which is prepared to give twelve hundred pounds¹ for the manuscript of an anti-Christian poem?

All this later work is a mere excrescence. Parny's claims as a poet rest upon his four books of *Poésies érotiques* and upon a certain amount of miscellaneous work of a similar kind. The reader of these at the present day may at first, but only at first, find their phraseology artificial, their ideas trite, their passion sentimental. Before he has turned a very few pages he will, if he be in the habit of critically reading poetry, begin to understand why Parny appeared to his contemporaries an apostle of naturalism and freshness. There is no attempt at innovation of language, and little at rejection of the commonplaces of the time, the sighs and the flames, the *Cythères* and the *myrtes*, and all the rest of it. But these artificial things are somehow used naturally, and not as if they were artificial, while the undefinable air of simple grace which is over the whole is felt at once. Let us take his most famous piece, the following:

VERS SUR LA MORT D'UNE JEUNE FILLE

Son âge échappait à l'enfance;
Riante comme l'innocence,
Elle avait les traits de l'amour.
Quelques mois, quelques jours encore,
Dans ce cœur pur et sans détour
Le sentiment allait éclore.

Mais le ciel avait au trépas
Condamné ses jeunes appas.
Au ciel elle a rendu sa vie,
Et doucement s'est endormie
Sans murmurer contre ses lois.
Ainsi le sourire s'efface;
Ainsi meurt, sans laisser de trace,
Le chant d'un oiseau dans les bois.

Only a few of the writers of the Greek Anthology and of our own seventeenth-century epitaphists have

¹ Exchange neglected. But the Soviet might (1924).

reached such simplicity and grace in treating such a subject. The poet's more amatory style is difficult to illustrate, because, though this part of his work is harmless enough, it has a decidedly creole warmth of colouring, and because, short as are most of the poems, they are yet somewhat too long for quotation. The following very short extract must suffice:

DEMAIN

Vous m'amusez par des caresses,
 Vous promettez incessamment,
 Et vous reculez le moment
 Qui doit accomplir vos promesses.
 "Demain" dites-vous tous les jours.
 L'impatience me dévore;
 L'heure qu'attendent les amours
 Sonne enfin, près de vous j'accours:
 "Demain" répétez-vous encore.
 Rendez grâce au Dieu bienfaisant
 Qui vous donna jusqu'à présent
 L'art d'être tous les jours nouvelle;
 Mais le temps, du bout de son aile,
 Touchera vos traits en passant;
 Dès *demain* vous serez moins belle
 Et moi peut-être moins pressant.

Both these extracts have been chosen rather to show Parny's power of managing the simplest and most ordinary language than to exhibit his command of colour and imagery. His work, however, is very far from deficient in these latter respects. A series of tableaux, entitled *Les Déguisements de Vénus*, are admirable of their kind, and deserve, now that tapestry has come again into fashion, to be wrought out therein. *Le Voyage de Céline* is a pleasant tale in verse, and the injurious remarks made in it by a negro who for the first time beholds European beauty are excellent. But we must fall back on the elegies and a few detached poems to Éléonore for Parny's most enduring contribution to literature. He belongs, of course, to the school of the bards of light love, of whom there are so many.

Their song in too many cases becomes insipid to generations whose mode of expression is different from theirs. But Parny has special saving gifts. These are, in the first place, his admirably limpid style and the sweet attractive kind of grace of which he is a master; in the second, the real tenderness, not to say passion, which pervades his work. He has neither the occasional insincerity and tinkle of Moore, nor the pedantry which sometimes mars our otherwise supreme amatory verse of the Caroline period, nor the monotony of Johannes Secundus, nor the wearisome stock metaphors and cut-and-dried emotions of the French school from Chaulieu to Dorat. It may be that he only seems a child of nature when compared with these latter. But, if he be not altogether a child of nature, he is the child of a very admirable art, limited, indeed, and intermittent in its application, but at its best more than sufficient to give him his passport to at least a minor kind of immortality. The immortality he enjoys is, it is to be feared, of an exceedingly minor kind. But as long as any lover of poetry takes the trouble now and then to recur to his work, so long will the true ring be found in him, amid much that is false and much that has for those who are not his contemporaries absolutely no sound, whether false or true. Chénier is the fashion and Parny is not, yet there are notes in Parny which Chénier never succeeded in sounding on his elaborately Grecian lyre.

II. DORAT

All who know anything of the French literature of the eighteenth century know that the Philosophical Church was not much more tolerant of dissenters and free-lances than the elder and more august institution. Those who were not sealed of the tribe of François-

Marie had to lay their account with a good deal of detraction, a vast amount of sneering, and occasionally some virtuous indignation, which at this distance of time seems to us not a little ridiculous. Among the men of letters who refused to be ranked among the *philosophes* was the pleasant versifier whose name stands at the head of this section. Dorat, though by no means a man of strait-laced morality, and not inclined to be violently orthodox, was too easy-going, too little given to thinking on serious subjects, and at the same time, we may perhaps say, too sensible to join the army of the enemies of *L'Infâme*. He did more than keep aloof from them; he occasionally presumed to attack them; and he had his reward. It became the fashion to sneer at him as a literary trifler. Lebrun, the best representative of Pindar which eighteenth-century France could lay its hands on, called him "Le ver luisant du Parnasse." Galiani, the wittiest and wickedest of all the Philosophic tribe, remarked of his charmingly illustrated books, "Ce poète se sauve du naufrage de planche en planche." Grimm, or some one of Grimm's contributors, informed him that he was "a canary." Dorat did not trouble himself much about these assaults; and, in his *Épître aux grands hommes des coteries*, showed himself to be possessed of good wit and of better sense than his enemies. The opening lines are worth quoting:

Écoutez-moi, mes chers amis,
Je n'aurai pas le ton sévère.
Soyez (si cela peut vous plaire)
Lumineux, profonds, érudits.
Régnez par vos calculs hardis
Sur la peuplade littéraire.
De Pétersbourg jusqu'à Paris
Tendez le filet salutaire
Où vont se prendre les esprits.
Que la clarté se développe
Avec chacun de vos pamphlets,

Qu'elle étonne par ses reflcts
 Tous les aveugles de l'Europe.
 Faites galoper vos agens,
 Extirpez les erreurs funestes;
 Mais, pour Dieu, soyez bonnes gens
 Et si vous pouvez, plus modestes.

It would not be easy to hit off the pretensions, the fussiness, and the foibles of the missionary Philosophers with, as Cowley somewhere says, "a more gentlemanlike correction."

Claude Joseph Dorat was born in 1734 and died in 1780. He belonged to a family of some position and wealth, and expressly disclaimed descent from his quasi-namesake, the teacher and member of the *Pléiade*. After trying the Bar, and serving for some time as a mousquetaire, he betook himself definitely to literature, and made even his enemies confess that he at least possessed industry. Although he died a comparatively young man, his works fill twenty volumes, containing examples of almost every style of literature that the time admired. He began, of course, with tragedy, and the collaboration of Crébillon the elder did not save *Zulica* from qualified damnation. Dorat, however, was not in the least discouraged—discouragement, indeed, seems to have been an unknown feeling with him—and during his life he produced a baker's dozen of tragedies and comedies, into which the inquisitive may be earnestly dissuaded from looking. But he was very far from confining himself to the drama, and indeed if he had done so, he would not be worth writing about. Nor do his prose efforts (romances sometimes in the fairy style of the younger Crébillon, and sometimes made up of long chains of letters) deserve much more attention. *Les Sacrifices de l'amour*, *Les malheurs de l'inconstance*, *Volsidor et Zulmiane*, are hardly worth turning over, even for the

sake of their illustrations, by which, according to Galiani's spiteful but appropriate pun, Dorat's books are generally saved. His real *forte* lay in the direction of light poetry of the kind which Voltaire had made fashionable, with an occasional echo of Chaulieu and his followers, or even of older work.

Dorat's special mania was the epistle. There is hardly any end to his verse-letters. Sometimes they bind themselves up in bundles as in the case of a deplorable *Chanoinesse de Lisbon*. More often they are detached, and of these detached epistles the number and the subjects are infinite. Dorat and Mr Toots would have entertained a sincere sympathy for one another. The poet sends epistles to Voltaire, to Hume, to every noteworthy personage of his time; he writes "To an atheist," "To a comet," "À la raison d'un homme qui n'en a pas." Had it occurred to him, he would certainly have written an epistle to Things in General. Besides these *Épîtres* he has odes, epigrams, songs, fables, verse-tales and every conceivable variety of occasional poetry. His fortune, which was fair, enabled him to bring out his books in a delightfully coquettish dress, and upon the illustrations of one alone he is said to have spent thirty thousand livres. The titles correspond to the dress. *Les Baisers* is indeed borrowed, as well as its contents; but *Mes Fantaisies*, *Mes Nouveaux Torts*, and so forth, are more original, and in their way not less pleasing. Unfortunately for Dorat the sale of his books by no means recompensed him for these extravagances, and for the similar but still more costly fancy which he had for equipping his worthless plays gorgeously. He got rid of most of his fortune, though it does not appear that he was ever in uncomfortably embarrassed circumstances. At last, and before very long, it was time to die. He was warned

of his danger and proceeded to make preparations for it in a style which, from all that we hear of him, seems to have had about it less bravado than childish whimsicality. He had his hair dressed and powdered, arrayed himself fully, and shortly after expired upon a sofa "en corrigeant une épreuve." Of all the queer variations of "Meum est propositum" that are on record, certainly this is the queerest.

It will be sufficiently obvious from what has been already said that Dorat can only be enjoyed by persons of a certain catholicity of taste, and by those persons only when they are in the mood. If Dresden china, minuets, powder, and so forth, are distasteful, Dorat will be distasteful too. If they are not distasteful, Dorat will be able to supply very appropriate music to accompany the entertainment. He is absolutely destitute of passion; indeed, it may be said that he does not even attempt it. One of his best things is a letter to a young lady—"Qui me proposait d'aller passer un mois avec elle"—and who seems to have been sentimental enough to recommend the country for the place of the joint sojourn. Dorat suggests the disadvantages of the proceeding in language which Célimène, under similar circumstances, would have been thankful for. But while there is thus no passion in him, and hardly any sentiment, he has not a few compensations. He is invariably good-humoured; he is rarely cynical in his good-humour; and though he sometimes tried hard to attain to the fashionable indecency, he was quite unable to make it rude or offensive. His best verse, too, is extraordinarily light and sparkling. *Les Vendanges de Vénus* is remarkable for the manner in which the short verses catch up and, so to speak, return the quick music of the song. In this French lyric poetry is apt to fail, the grave

harmony of the Alexandrine having so deeply stamped itself upon the whole prosody of the language that it is difficult to get rid of it. If Philine had known this song, it is probable that she would have sung it, and William Blake must surely have had it in his head when he wrote a certain vigorous epigram about "age and sickness." Of this sort of sparkling verse there is not a little scattered about Dorat's twenty volumes. Here for instance is an almost perfect example of the *lestement enlevé* kind, not in the least shocking in the language of its day and generation, whatever it may be now:

Que pour Bacchus ou pour l'Amour
 On fasse une partie,
 Que ce soit de nuit ou de jour
 J'en ai d'abord envie!
 J'ai toujours soif, j'aime sans fin
 Rouge et blanc, brune et blonde;
 Je voudrais boire tout le vin
 Et baiser tout le monde!

A poet who more absolutely demands the aid of the selector could hardly be found. Yet the original volumes have, as has been before remarked, a special charm of their own. No one who has read them fails afterwards to associate in some inextricable manner the light and fluttering verses with the illustrations so bountifully scattered about them. These illustrations, in the earlier volumes chiefly by Eisen, in the latter by Marillier, are admirable examples of the charming *taille douce*, the secret of which the eighteenth century seems to have carried off with it. In the fables, for instance, every poem has its headpiece illustrating the subject, and besides this an elaborate tailpiece, which may or may not directly concern the poem, but which is always delicately conceived and admirably drawn. Sometimes it is a Cupid paying attention to a hooped and powdered damsel in a "cabinet of verdure,"

sometimes a bouquet of roses and myrtles and all the flora of Venus, sometimes a conventional pile of masks and scutcheons and armour, but always something attractive and fanciful. The frontispieces, as usual, are simple, but especially careful in style.

All this forms a very pleasant and seductive framework and scenery for the Parnassus in which Dorat, according to his enemies, performs the undignified functions of glow-worm and canary. All I can say is that uglier birds than canaries, and insects very much more offensive than glow-worms, have sometimes found their way to the holy hill. When the contemporary critics were in a good humour they admitted that, if Dorat was an imitator of Voltaire, he was at any rate the best of such imitators. I should be inclined to say that in some respects he was less an imitator of Voltaire than was thought, at a time when it was matter of breviary that Voltaire had tried every style and was unsurpassable in all. In mere wit, of course, the comparison would be absurd. But Dorat has made a closer approach to really lyrical versification than his master. Voltaire's verse, admirable as it is in some ways, usually deserves the reproach, from which so little French poetry from Malherbe to Lamartine can escape, that it is Alexandrines cut up into lengths, and it very seldom possesses the springing and bounding movement of which Dorat, as has been shown by example, was capable.

To keep up the zoological metaphors with which his enemies treated him, no poet was ever more of a butterfly than Dorat. But butterflies in fine weather and in suitable surroundings are pretty enough to look at.

III. DÉSAUGIERS

In the extremely interesting autobiography which Béranger has left us he gives an account of his own convictions at the beginning of his career as to the necessity of some alteration in the style of French song-writing. The old themes were completely worn out, he says, and the old treatment of them had ceased to be acceptable. A people who had made the Revolution had risen above tales of "tricked husbands, greedy lawyers, and Charon's bark." One cannot be too grateful to any theory which led to the writing of *Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans* or of the *Chanson des fous*. Nor is it necessary to inquire too deeply whether, as often happens, the poet, writing long after the events, did not attribute to formal reasoning and system the results of instinctive taste and sometimes of accident. It is sufficient to say that the implied censure of the style of song-writing prevalent in his own youth is amply justified. Of that style Désaugiers was the last, the most finished, and the most popular representative. Even after Béranger there have never been wanting in France persons who lament the innovations of the later singers, and who sigh for the more artless and Gallic strains of the good-natured president of the *Caveau*. "Désaugiers c'est la chanson" somebody has said, with the ineffable satisfaction at summing up the matter neatly which only a Frenchman can feel. Apparently, then, we have only to examine Désaugiers to discover the essence of what has been sometimes held up as a specially French form of composition.

He was born in 1772 at Fréjus, of a musical and literary stock. His father was a composer of some note, his elder brother wrote operas and plays in considerable numbers, and though the younger brother betook

himself chiefly to the graver ways of diplomacy, he left some literary remains. Marie-Antoine-Madeleine, the second son, was very early distinguished as a general favourite. A benevolent bishop wished to make an abbé of him; but Désaugiers was not long in deciding that he had no vocation; and, indeed, about the same time the Revolution made the professional prospects of an abbé none of the brightest. Such political sentiments as he had were decidedly Royalist, and he was glad of the opportunity given him, by the marriage of his sister with a colonist, to leave France. In San Domingo he again showed himself master of *l'art de plaire*, until, unluckily for him, the negro revolt broke out. He was captured by the rebels, and was within an ace of being shot. Escaping this fate, he embarked for the United States. But his bad luck pursued him. On board ship he sickened of some disease which was mistaken for yellow fever, and the terrified sailors unceremoniously put him ashore. Forlorn and destitute, he was taken in by a lady, who nursed him till he recovered. Philadelphia rather than New York was then the chief resort of strangers in the United States, and there Désaugiers for some time maintained himself by giving lessons on the pianoforte. He did not, however, remain long in America. The worst days of the Revolution were past, and Paris was an irresistible attraction to a man of Désaugiers's temperament. Thither he accordingly returned.

From this time to the end of his life his chief occupations were theatrical, the writing of the songs by which his name is now preserved being mainly an amusement. He wrote, chiefly in collaboration, about a hundred vaudevilles, *féeries*, parodies, and similar dramatic trifles, which are only distinguished from the general run of such things by the greater abundance and better

quality of the *couplets* which abound in them. After a time he was made director of the Vaudeville Theatre, and managed it with considerable success, notwithstanding his easy-going temperament. He was one of the most popular personages of his day, though, like most men in such a position, he was sometimes anonymously attacked, opinion being kind enough to father some of the attacks on Béranger. Perhaps, however, his most important post was the presidentship of the celebrated *Caveau*. This convivial society, originally founded in the second half of the eighteenth century by Gallet, a grocer who ought to have saved his fellows from the obloquy attached to their name, survived after a fashion for more than a century in the form of a club which later generations have accused of displaying very little of the jollity of its ancestors. The life of the *Caveau*, however, has been far from continuous, and there have been not a few breaks in its history. In the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, under Désaugiers, it was in the height of its glory. The devotion of most of its members to Bacchus was by no means merely conventional, and Désaugiers was one of the most ardent of the devotees. As is the case with most professedly gay persons, stories are told of his uneasy melancholy when he was not under the influence of company and wine. He paid the penalty usual with the seekers of artificial paradises. Symptoms of calculus showed themselves as he grew older, and in 1825 he succumbed to an operation which had become necessary.

Désaugiers has in one sense a really historical interest. He is perhaps the last literary specimen of the skipping, grinning, and shrugging type which our good grandfathers used to associate with the idea of a Frenchman. Large portions of his work depend for

any comic effect that they have, or ever might have had, upon the pantomimic gestures by which they are intended to be accompanied. Thus in one case the singer is directed to yawn and stretch his arms all through the song. Another resource of his is the affixing of refrains of the *pan-pan, zic-zoc* order to his verses. In yet a third class, and it is one of the largest, provincialisms are the means resorted to to raise a laugh. Cadet Buteux is a blockhead who goes through all sorts of experiences, and then gives an account of them in jargon. Even Frenchmen at the present day do not seem to find any great fund of amusement in such verses as

Depuis longtemps j'avions le cœur tout en cendres
 Pour les appas d'mam'selle Manon Giroux.
 Nous v'là fiancés. . . J'lis *Les deux gendres*:
 J'm'dis, "gna qeupu' mariage là-d'sous."

It is quite easy to understand that songs of this kind, sung in good character after dinner, might obtain applause; but it is not easy to understand how any literary merit can be thought to be discernible in them. It is true that Désaugiers does not always rely on such means of obtaining a laugh. He has passages of simple Epicurean lyric which are far from bad of their kind, such, for instance, as the following:

MORALITÉ

Enfants de la folie,
 Chantons;
 Sur les maux de la vie
 Glissons;
 Plaisir jamais ne coûte
 De pleurs;
 Il sème notre route
 De fleurs.

Oui, portons son délire
 Partout;
 Le bonheur est de rire
 De tout.

Pour être aimé des belles,
 Aimons;
 Un beau jour changent-elles,
 Changeons.

Déjà l'hiver de l'âge
 Accourt;
 Profitons d'un passage
 Si court;
 L'avenir peut-il être
 Certain?
 Nous finirons peut-être
 Demain.

The matter of this is trivial enough, but its manner is light and brisk, and not destitute of a certain music. Another successful style with Désaugiers was the proverb-song, in which some well-known maxim serves as a refrain. His work in this line seems to have been more serviceable to Béranger as a model than any other; and admirers of the greater singer may trace some resemblance to his *faire* in these verses of the lesser:

TOUT CE QUI LUIT N'EST PAS OR
 Pour une chanson nouvelle
 J'invoquais mon Apollon,
 Quand je vis à ma chandelle
 Se brûler un papillon;
 Et cet incident tragique
 M'inspira, sans nul effort,
 Ce refrain philosophique:
 Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

Sans argent, sans espérance
 Figeac plaignait son destin.
 "Hé! morgué! d'la patience,"
 Lui dit Pierre, son voisin;
 "L'soleil luit pour tout le monde."
 Il luit, j'en tombe d'accord,
 Mais lorsque l'estomac gronde
 Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

Dans mille pièces mesquines
 Qu'un jour voit s'évanouir,
 Costumes, décors, machines,
 Tout est fait pour éblouir;

Mais au bout de la quinzaine
 La baisse du coffre-fort
 Prouve au caissier qu'à la scène
 Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

Quand une Agnès se dit riche,
 Quand un fat vante son nom,
 Quand un médecin s'affiche,
 Quand une belle dit non,
 Quand un voyageur bavarde,
 Quand un Anglais se dit lord,
 Mes amis, prenez-y garde:
 Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

These two pieces are perhaps as good short specimens of Désaugiers as can be found; and, though they may show that he exerted some influence on Béranger's style and versification, they show still more clearly how great an advance his pupil made upon the manner, the subjects, and the general tone of the master. It was this tone which Marchangy charged Béranger with altering and spoiling by the introduction of political and other burning topics into the hitherto peaceable region of the *chanson*. Readers may judge of the justice of the charge and of the reasonableness of the regrets which have sometimes been expressed in France at the alteration. "Mais à présent c'est bien fini de rire" is no doubt a lamentable reflection; but, if the laugh can only be kept up by such unreal means as those which Désaugiers resorted to, perhaps it might be as well to cry for a change. In some of his longer and narrative pieces he displays, indeed, the usual French faculty of telling a tale pleasantly, and with a certain pleasant slyness. But on the general run of his songs hardly any more favourable verdict can be pronounced than this—that the best of them would be fair impromptus for a convivial meeting, and that the worst of them are at about music-hall level in point of wit, if not of vulgarity.

Nor must it be thought that this is merely the opinion of Englishmen, enemies of gaiety, eaten up with moroseness and spleen, and apt to depreciate the excellences which they cannot comprehend. The view of Désaugiers which I have taken is decidedly less unfavourable than that of M. Hippolyte Babou, a Frenchman of Frenchmen, and one who specially devoted himself to the light literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. "Rien de moins gai au monde," "inanité," "fadaïses," "ton glacial," "Boufflers d'arrière-boutique," are some of the stones which, in spite of a somewhat ghastly punning prayer of Désaugiers or somebody else, M. Babou flings at the harmless president of the French "Cave of Harmony." In this judgment there is perhaps some harshness. But it is not to be denied that Désaugiers is somewhat dreary reading at the present day. He was, unluckily for himself, born just too early or too late, and the Revolution did not do him the favour which it did to many of his contemporaries, the favour of cutting off their heads, so that they could not make anachronisms of themselves. Désaugiers was certainly an anachronism. With Lamartine and Châteaubriand in full force, with Victor Hugo "mewing his mighty youth," with Courier, and Lamennais, and others, adjusting themselves in this way and that to the new order of things, he went on imitating in *falsetto* the tones of Collé and Panard, tones always more or less false, but in his time jarring hopelessly with all around. Worse than all this, too, was the existence of a contemporary, not many years his junior, who had seen and grappled with and triumphed over the difficulties which he himself ignored or shirked. It is, however, that contemporary who gives Désaugiers his interest. It is very seldom critically permissible to regard any author

merely as a foil to another; but the temptation to do so is irresistible in the case before us. The true value of Béranger can hardly be estimated without some knowledge of his immediate forerunner.

IV. VADÉ

It is sometimes rather irritating to lovers of English literature who happen to be also lovers of French, to perceive what a much better fate French authors of the second or third class have than our own in the matter of reprints. Even our great classics are not always too accessible to those who cannot hunt up original editions; and as for the lesser stars, most of them may be said to be hardly accessible at all. In France, on the other hand, the three great collections of MM. Didot, Charpentier, and Garnier supply for a few francs copies of almost all French authors of any eminence since the middle of the seventeenth century, with a good many of earlier date; while the innumerable *éditions de luxe* which MM. Lemerre, Quantin, Jouaust, and others, not to mention the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne, have supplied during the last thirty or forty years, extend the list to almost every author, not merely of eminence, but of any considerable literary and personal interest. It is certainly a curious contrast that, taking names almost at random and as they occur to the memory, we should have no full modern editions of Otway, of Green—Spleen-Green—or of Anstey¹; while in the course of four years two careful and elaborate reprints of the author whose name stands at the head of this article appeared in France. In 1875

¹ These three names require no change at the end of thirteen years though there has been a certain amount of rather unsystematic reprinting among us meanwhile (1892). And since then more in various "collections" and "libraries." But these deal principally with the same things over and over again (1924).

M. Julien Lemer made an excellent, though unpretentious, selection of Vadé for the Garnier collection. In the spring of 1879 "ce polisson de Vadé" (as Voltaire, with exceeding injustice, used to designate him) had the honour of making the first of a sumptuous little collection of eighteenth-century poets, published by Quantin. This volume, however, pretty as it is, is not nearly so full or so characteristic as the earlier selection.

Vadé is one of those authors who have a real interest, and even a real importance, in literary history, for reasons not directly concerned with the intrinsic merit of their works. In the first place, the history of his reputation is a very curious one. He had for a time a great vogue, and that vogue ceased chiefly as a consequence of the unceremonious borrowing of his name for the purpose of fathering work of greater merit than his own. Voltaire, as we have noticed, was wont to mention him with anything but respect, his crime being the unpardonable one of friendship and association with the detested Fréron. But no sooner was he dead than Voltaire took his name, and set it to some of his own best productions. The *Contes de G. Vadé*, and, still more, the famous *Pauvre Diable*, helped, by their attribution to a certain non-existent Guillaume and his equally non-existent cousin Catherine, to obscure the fame of the authentic Jean-Joseph; and Voltaire's example raised up a whole family of pseudonymous Vadés, who performed the same ungrateful part of sometimes eclipsing and sometimes throwing discredit upon the personage to whom they owed their name. Except that his works continued to be republished, and that he retained a vague celebrity as the inventor of the *genre poissard*, Vadé passed pretty well out of literary cognisance. It was even long before he reaped the benefit of the nineteenth-century tendency to

rummage the cupboards and waste heaps of the past for curiosities. Until quite recently his best chance of being read was the fact of the existence of an exceedingly beautiful edition of him, printed "on grey paper," but by no means "with blunt type," at the very best period of the Didot press, and embellished with lovely tinted illustrations. *Madame Angot* and M. Zola between them helped to resuscitate him, the argument being apparently that the *langue verte* of one day is as interesting as the *langue verte* of another, while in Vadé there is at least plenty of fun, no horrors, and no morbid pseudo-psychology to spoil the enjoyment of him.

Jean-Joseph Vadé was a Picard, and was born at Ham in 1719. He died at Paris in 1757, so that his life, if a tolerably merry one, was also decidedly short. He was an incorrigible dunce in his youth, but before very long showed a talent for verse-writing. A series of small employments in the Revenue Department at last landed him in a tolerably comfortable sinecure at Paris, where he thenceforth lived. It was not long before he began to write comic operas and other light pieces for the stage; and his scraps of song, either in these pieces or published independently, soon made him a popular favourite. One of Voltaire's charges against him is that to him was due the famous and unlucky surname of Bien-Aimé, which was conferred upon Louis XV at the time of the temporary dismissal of Mme de Châteauroux; and the accusation at least shows that Vadé was popular. Like most of the song-writers of the eighteenth century, he was strongly Royalist; attachment to the monarchy and hatred of the English being the obligatory stock-in-trade of a chansonnier who wished to please at once the people and the police. But Vadé's private character, from the point of view of the easy-going morality of the time,

was far from bad, and the term *polisson* is certainly an injustice. Even the censorious and uncharitable Collé, who, in the journal which he was secretly keeping, registered every peccadillo of his friends, expressly describes Vadé as “un galant homme qui a des mœurs et de l’honnêteté.” It is not known what induced him to take to the *genre poissard*, but it is certain that he imitated no one in so doing. The market-women of Paris had long been famous for freedom of tongue, and it had been there, as elsewhere, an occasional amusement with idle men of fashion to visit the Halles and attempt to bandy compliments with them. But Vadé seems to have been the first to attempt, on any large scale, the presentation of their dialect in literature. His experiments in this way took various forms. His principal work is a mock-heroic poem entitled *La Pipe cassée*, in which it is told how an estimable person named La Tulipe had an invaluable and beautifully coloured pipe broken in his efforts to restore peace between his enraged womankind. Next to this in importance come *Les Quatre Bouquets poissards*, telling the unhappy fate of a lover who, with the harmless design of buying a bouquet for his mistress, has to run the gauntlet of the flower-sellers’ satire. Many of Vadé’s comic operettas are also written in the same language. But perhaps the best of his work is to be found in the *Lettres de la Grenouillère* and in the *Déjeuner de La Râpée*, both of which are mainly in prose. The personages of the first work are M. Jérôme Dubois, fisherman, and Mlle Nanette Dubut, laundress, and the letters are written with a very charming delicacy and at the same time with great naturalness and truth of touch. Delicacy is not the prevailing characteristic of the other work mentioned; but in vividness and quaint nature it is quite the equal of the *Grenouillère* corre-

spondence. Nor is all this work so frivolous as it appears at first sight. Vadé does not merely aim at surprising his patrons with something strange, and tickling them with something indecorous. He has a real sympathy with his subjects, a sympathy which breaks out in such lines as those in which he describes his fishwives, who

En gueulant arpentent Paris
Pour aider leurs pauvres maris.

It is this sympathy, no doubt, which gives value to his work and renders it interesting in spite of its apparent frivolity and sometimes of its unworthiness. Of form and culture Vadé had little or nothing. One of his favourite styles was the *amphigouri*, a variety of nonsense-verse to which the earlier eighteenth century was very much addicted, and which consisted mainly in an assemblage of the most incongruous names and things arranged so as to give plenty of startling rhymes, thus:

Alaric
A Dantzic
Vit Pégase,
Qui jouait avec Brébeuf
Au volant dans un œuf
Au pied du mont Caucase,
Etc. etc. etc.

Perhaps this nonsense is better worth quoting than it seems, for it may be remembered that the eighteenth century had not a monopoly of the taste for literary follies. Vadé, however, is no doubt the lightest of all the foam bubbles that were flung up before the great torrent dashed over the precipice of the Revolution. "On ne ressuscite pas la gaieté, qui n'est que gai," some one has said, and the phrase certainly applies to Vadé. His *poissarderies* are hardly suitable for quotation. In his other work it is only now and then that

one comes across a lively and well-expressed passage like the following:

Je suis un Narcisse nouveau,
Qui s'aime et qui s'admire;
Mais dans le vin et non dans l'eau
Sans cesse je me mire.
En y voyant le coloris,
Qu'il donne à mon visage,
De l'amour de moi-même épris
J'avale mon image.

He left behind him, besides these vain and light compositions, a daughter as vain and as light as they are. Mlle Vadé was for a moment one of the stars of the Comédie Française, a star, however, who appears to have shone rather by her personal gifts than by any great success in her art. She died, it is thought, before she was five-and-twenty, everything that owed its origin to Vadé being apparently as short-lived as it was graceful and popular.

Vadé, however, has a real importance in the literary and social history of the eighteenth century. It was he who, in however frivolous a manner and for whatever unworthy purposes, first brought up into the notice of the cultivated and fashionable world of Paris the actual thoughts, speech, and manners of the lower classes. Literature even in its least constrained moments had for nearly a century been always in full dress. Every man of letters had talked or tried to talk *en marquis*, and when an alternative was wanted to Versailles, it was found only in the hopelessly unreal Arcadia peopled by the models of Sèvres and Dresden. Vadé's boatmen and laundresses, fishwomen and *forts de la halle*, were studied from nature, even if the studies were caricatured. For half a century at least, from the flourishing of Chaulieu to the flourishing of Bernis, all light poetry had been utterly and of malice prepense

artificial. Vadé's strains were, at any rate, natural. Nor does it seem to be a far-fetched explanation of his apparently fanciful choice of style to connect it with the general uprising of the wider and more popular sympathies which were shortly to show themselves in the social and political theories that in their turn led to a terribly practical revolution. From the *poissardes* of Vadé to the *poissardes* of '93 is a long step; but it was in *La Pipe cassée* and *Les Bouquets poissards* that the idiosyncrasies of the working-men and working-women, with whom their children were destined later to make so terrible an acquaintance, were first introduced to the world of marquises and great ladies, of tax-farmers and drawing-room abbés. Here, as in other instances, Samson made sport for the Philistines for some time before he exhibited his powers as other than a sport-maker. It is something to have been master of the ceremonies on the first introduction of two such classes to each other, and this position at least "ce polisson nommé Vadé" may claim.

V. PIRON

The author of *La Métromanie* is one of those literary persons of whom everybody knows one thing, and hardly anybody knows any more.

Ci-gît Piron, qui ne fut rien,
Pas même Académicien,

is familiar to thousands of readers who have no idea whatever of the history and other writings of the witty epigrammatist, or whose further knowledge, if it exists at all, is limited to his only famous comedy. Among those few, too, who have taken the trouble to inform themselves further, there is a very considerable difference of opinion as to the merits of the "machine à saillies," as Grimm termed him. One class of critics

(including, it must be confessed, names of the greatest weight) is inclined to see in the Burgundian poet little more than a wilful offender against decency, and a spiteful Ishmaelite of the pen, whose errors are barely here and there redeemed by witty sallies and pointed raillery. Another class reverses the arrangement, and regards Piron as something of an eighteenth-century Rabelais, whose sins are more than atoned for by the humour and *verve* of his style and sayings. In this case, as in many others, it is necessary to look narrowly at literary records, in order to appraise properly the judgments which literary historians have passed, for there is no branch of history in which second-hand opinions are so readily accepted and so persistently handed on. When we remember that Piron was emphatically a free-lance, that he scandalised the orthodox at the same time that he lampooned the philosophers, that while he wrote thirty-two epigrams on Fréron and fifty-four on Desfontaines he was little more sparing of his irreverent criticisms on their great opponent, it becomes clear that we should accept opinions about him with a good deal of caution. On the face of it the author of the epigram-epitaph cannot have been a dull man; and the uncle who, when his niece had clandestinely married, and had kept the secret, fearing his displeasure, made over the greater part of his property to her in solemn form, beginning "Je lègue à Nanette ma nièce, FEMME DE CAPRON," with the words *femme de Capron* in capitals, cannot have been an ill-natured one.

Alexis Piron was born at Dijon on the 9th of July 1689, and died at Paris in 1773. It does not appear that he entertained for his native city any of the enthusiasm which a Dijonnais of the nineteenth century, the admirable and unfortunate Louis Bertrand,

has expressed; but his father, Aimé Piron, was a zealous Burgundian, and showed his provincialism, if the term may be allowed in a new and more favourable acceptation, in more ways than one. He wrote a good deal of verse in *patois*, especially *Noëls*, a Burgundian form which La Monnoye, the well-known commentator on Old French, made famous. Alexis very early showed himself to be a son of his father in the possession of a tendency to rhyme. He showed, too, the curious mixture, or rather alternation, of piety and profanity which afterwards characterised him. One of his earliest preserved poems is purely devotional in character and very earnest in tone; another is of so scandalous a kind that it was perpetually brought up against him, and excluded him from the Academy. He was educated for the law, but seems to have had little affection for it, and at length he wandered to Paris and drifted into literary work of one kind or another. At first he undertook the dreary and ungrateful task of "buck-washing" the bad verses of a nobleman. Soon, however, he displayed a certain dramatic talent. Piron was one of those literary men who are better at *tours de force* than at regular work, and it was a *tour de force* that brought him into notice. The jealousy of the Comédie Française had procured an edict whereby the Opéra Comique was restricted to a single actor speaking on the scene. This remarkable relegation of theatrical conditions to their earliest form completely nonplussed the usual writers, including even Lesage, and the manager, in a despairing state, appealed to Piron, whose offers to write he had previously refused. Piron gave him *Arlequin-Deucalion*, which was completely successful. He did not limit himself to work of this kind, but transgressed into regular tragedy and comedy, in which walks he had, with the exception

of *La Métromanie*, no great success. His reputation, however, was high. The Academy, indeed, shut its doors to him, earning thereby an unceasing shower of the bitterest and best epigrams in the language. But the King and many noblemen were his liberal patrons; and he seems, at any rate during the last half-century of his life, to have been very well off.

His private life was chiefly led in two different circles, both interesting in their way. He was a member of the first *Caveau*, sharing its chief honours with Gallet, Panard, Crébillon fils, and Gentil-Bernard. He also had a kind of feminine *cénacle*, which recalls, as others of his characteristics also recall, some particulars of the life of Swift. Piron's feminine allies were Mlle Quinault, an actress, and Mlle de Bar, companion to the Marchioness de Mimeure. The former was beautiful and witty; the latter, witty and ugly. After twenty years of friendship Piron married Mlle de Bar, and tended her with unflinching gentleness during an attack of mental disease which soon came upon her, and which killed her at last. Mlle Quinault's affection does not seem to have been altered by the marriage, and the poet continued to be on the best terms with her. In their correspondence, prose and verse, Piron is Binbin; she is Tonton; her cousin, Mlle Balicourt, is Bouri, and so forth; while benevolent patrons, like the Count de Livry and the Count de Saint-Florentin, make occasional appearances. To the outer world, however, Piron was very far from being amiable, and very few of the prominent men of letters of the day escaped his sting. One of his chief abominations was Nivelles de la Chaussée, the inventor of *Comédie larmoyante*. Two of Piron's hits at this personage are worth quoting. The first is in allusion to the frosty welcome given to a piece of the victim's:

Chaleur subite
Faisait trop vite
Pousser les blés;
Monsieur Nivelle
A dit "Qu'il gèle,"
Il a gelé.

The second explains itself:

Connaissez-vous sur l'Hélicon
L'une et l'autre Thalie?
L'une est chaussée, et l'autre non,
Mais c'est la plus jolie.
L'une a le rire de Vénus,
L'autre est froide et pincée;
Honneur à la belle aux pieds nus;
Nargue de *La Chaussée*!

Here is one of his innumerable assaults on the Academy, the chief merit of which is the mock gravity given to it by a slight archaism of language:

En France on fait, par un plaisant moyen,
Taïre un auteur quand d'écrits il assomme.
Dans un fauteuil d'Académicien,
Lui quarantième, on fait asseoir cet homme.
Lors il s'endort et ne fait plus qu'un somme.
Plus n'en avez prose ni madrigal.
Au bel esprit ce fauteuil est, en somme,
Ce qu'à l'amour est le lit conjugal.

Very admirable, too, is his summary of the tedious process of reception. Says the novice, "Monsieur, grand merci"; replies the director, "Monsieur, il n'y a pas de quoi." The stories of his sharp sayings are infinite. Once, it is said, in one of his curious fits of piety, he attended the levee of the Archbishop of Paris, who, wishing to be gracious, asked him, "Avez-vous lu mon dernier mandement, Monsieur Piron?" Where-to the poet replied, "Et vous, Monseigneur?" Even better known is the legend of his listening to a poem full of plagiarisms which some aspirant insisted on reading to him. At each reminiscence he solemnly lifted his hat, until at last the author, nettled, asked him what was the matter. "C'est que j'ai la coutume

de saluer les gens de ma connaissance," was the reply. One can fancy how that young man loved Piron ever after; and, in truth, a great majority of his acquaintances in the literary world had something of the kind to quicken their affection for him. When he died, we are told that only Diderot, of all the men of letters in Paris, attended his funeral. The fact is characteristic of Diderot; characteristic also of Piron's popularity.

There have been three or four reprints of selections from Piron of late years; and at the appearance of one of these the *Revue des Deux Mondes* asked whether a reprint of him could be said to be called for. If the question be decided with reference to the actual material value of the work reprinted, the answer might perhaps be negative. But good French, good wit, and good style can never be obsolete. The inspirations of the author of *La Métromanie* were almost always purely occasional, and the occasions were by no means always of the worthiest. But in his manner of availing himself of them there was much of the specially French merits which distinguished the best literature of the eighteenth century. The sharp crispness of language, the admirable concinnity of expression, the strong and straight-flying (if too often spiteful) wit that directed and accompanied his sallies, are not perhaps at the present day so frequently or so invariably found in his successors as to make the representation of this model superfluous. It was Piron's misfortune that he lived at a time when there was not much employment for occasional literary talent which had no particular vocation, and that his incurably *frondeur* spirit excluded him from the ranks of the *philosophe* party, the only one which had anything like a common object and a serious purpose. Born fifty years later, he would have been a formidable rival to

Chamfort and Rivarol in the war of sharp sayings which preceded the Revolution. Born a hundred years later, he would have been an ideal journalist of the lighter kind, and might have made in his own way a reputation equal to that of Paul Louis Courier or of Benjamin Constant. As it was, he devoted himself avowedly to nothing, and nothing has rewarded him in its own way. The following verses are the extended form of the famous epitaph which he himself compressed into a distich for the benefit of short memories:

Ci-gît... Qui? Quoi? Ma foi! personne, rien.
 Un qui vivant ne fut valet ni maître,
 Juge, artisan, marchand, praticien,
 Homme des champs, soldat, robin ni prêtre,
 Marguillier, même Académicien,
 Ni frimaçon. Il ne voulut rien être,
 Et véquit nul: en quoi certe il fit bien;
 Car, après tout, bien fou qui se propose,
 Venu de rien et revenant à rien,
 D'être en passant ici-bas quelque chose.

Unfortunately in the case of those "qui ne veulent rien être" posterity, not altogether unreasonably, is a little prone to take them according to the letter of their desire. Epigrams may be good things to temper despotisms with, but they are themselves a somewhat untempered mortar wherewith to build a durable reputation.

VI. PANARD

An essayist who should not fear to touch the titles of Charles Lamb might perhaps take a worse subject than the decay of drinking-songs. For the last half-century it would be difficult to find any instance in the more prominent literatures of Europe of a Bacchanalian poet, and the instances of those who have recently tried to make themselves exceptions to the rule are rather more convincing than the silence of the majority. The *maladie du siècle* does not seem to have had any

unfavourable effect on the consumption of fermented liquors, but it certainly has interfered with their poetical celebration. Perhaps nobody now requires to be lyrically converted to the faith of Bacchus; perhaps nobody has a sufficiently genuine belief in that faith to celebrate it. Certain it is that neither in English nor in French has the worship of the *dive bouteille* been poetically fertile of late. The last considerable man of letters in England who produced genuine drinking-songs was, I suppose, Peacock. Even he, however, had ceased to write them for many years before his death. *Gryll Grange* contains no drinking-song to match its admirable "Love and Age"; *Crotchet Castle* even has but one snatch, though a noble one; and if we want genuine stuff of the kind, we must go back to *Maid Marian* and her elders. It is true that Thackeray's *Ballads* contain certain exhortations to conviviality, the poetical merit of which no one will contest. But these are rarely, if ever, pure anacreontics, and the charm of "The Mahogany Tree," of "The Age of Wisdom," and of the close of the "Ballad of Bouillabaisse" is due at least as much to their melancholy as to their mirth. It may be laid down that no one in England whose youth came much later than the days of the Regency has had the secret of this sort of composition; in France it is very doubtful whether anybody born since the Revolution has had it.

This peculiarity of our time makes us look with something more than merely antiquarian interest on poets who have in good faith given themselves up to this extinct variety of poetry. Such a one, and a remarkably typical representative of the class, was Panard, the chief singer of the first *Caveau*, whose glass (holding a full bottle of claret) is to this day religiously preserved by the society which inherits the title, whose

practice was fully commensurate with his theory, and whose character appears to have approached with remarkable closeness the ideal of an anacreontic and epicurean bard. Panard was none of the hypocrites who chant Bacchus under the inspiration of toast and water, and exhort their friends to be merry over a captain's biscuit; nor was he, as far as at this distance of time it is possible to discover, in any way hypocritical in his affectation of *joyeuseté*. He kept no malicious diary in secret, like Collé, jotting down the weaknesses and misfortunes of his friends; he carried on no war of epigrams with the world at large, like Piron; he had even, it would seem, no moments of depression and *ἑωλοκρασία* like his successor Désaugiers. He lived in peace and charity with all men and women, consumed a vast quantity of more or less good wine, and yielded in his turn a vast quantity of more or less good verse.

Panard was a native of Chartres, and, like his friends Collé and Piron, was a long-liver, despite his addiction to conviviality. He was born in 1694, and did not die until 1765. The earlier part of his life seems to have been spent in some small Government appointment; for the necessities of the latter part a few of his friends, themselves by no means rich, provided by a subscription the proceeds of which were invested in a small annuity. Seldom indeed was there a more popular person than Panard or one whose necessities were less pressing. Marmontel, who, though a very much younger man, knew him well, has left a full description of his way of life. His abode was the humblest of garrets, almost unfurnished. A bed, a couple of chairs which served for a wardrobe when his scanty stock of clothes was not on his back, and a wig-box, appear to have made up the total. This wig-box served him as a treasure-chest, just as Campbell used to use his

slippers for a similar purpose, only that Campbell's treasures were authentic bank-notes, and Panard's were pieces of verse written on bits of paper very much stained with wine. When Marmontel, in his capacity of editor of the *Mercure*, wanted something for his Poet's Corner, he used (he tells us) to go to Panard, and was invariably told to "look in the wig-box," where he took his choice.

Everybody seems to have been fond of the burly songster, whom, as one of his critics has ingeniously said, "somebody set running, and the tide of song flowed on till the cask was empty." A member of the *Caveau*, he was the only dissentient when the too severe morality of that convivial assemblage turned out the grocer Gallet for the crime of usury. "M. Gallet est prié de dîner les dimanches partout ailleurs qu'au Caveau," ran the remarkable invitation or prohibition which, it is said at Crébillon's dictation, expressed the wishes of the Club. But Panard was faithful to his friend, even when he had had losses and was repenting his usury in the Temple. He divides with Vadé the doubtful honour of having dubbed Louis XV Le Bien-Aimé, and in his case, at least, posterity has been content to accept the proceeding as a proof merely of innocence and not of servility. Like almost all his friends, he wrote for the stage, and, liberally as he has for the most part been judged, his critics have been obliged to confess that he was not a great dramatic poet. But his comic operas and such like pieces are remarkable for the abundance and the quality of the songs and verses with which they are interspersed. It does not appear that any complete edition of Panard has ever been published; and, unlike most of his friends, he has not yet profited by the reprinting mania. There is a very pretty four-volume edition of him issued about

the time of his death, and another printed some forty years later by the chansonnier and vaudevillist Gouffé; but neither of these is at all exhaustive. Nor is Panard a person who calls for a complete edition. On the other hand, he very well deserves, and is specially fitted for, the process of judicious selection, which, so far as I know, he has not yet received.

The chief thing to be remarked about the unpremeditated verse which Panard poured out in vast quantities, and apparently without effort, is its spontaneous and genuine character. The sentiments may be false or conventional, but there is a sincerity of conviction about the singer which is not to be mistaken. When Panard says,

Il n'y a rien sur la terre
De si bon ni de si beau que le verre,

he says an absurdity, no doubt, and not a very novel absurdity either; but of his individual belief in the proposition there can hardly be any doubt. There is a quaint epigram of his which in anybody else's mouth might seem only an ingenious conceit. It runs thus:

Tout passe, amis: tout passe dans la terre.
Ce sont du ciel les ordres absolus.
Tel qui voit du vin dans mon verre
Dans un moment n'en verra plus.

Evidently the poet has just been struck, practically, by this painful application of the law that nothing endures. Not Mr Browning himself feels more keenly the inability of the soul's and the body's hand-palms to keep one good fair wise thing just as they clasped it. In all the line of anacreontic bards Panard perhaps is the only one in whom this absolutely genuine tone is to be found. He does not sing, or drink, or sing about drinking because it is the proper thing to do, or because he has some ingenious notions that can be brought in,

or for any other reason of the kind, but solely because he believes what he says. Hear him, for instance, in the following song, which displays a very remarkable science both of verse and rhyme:

J'ai toujours, Bacchus,
Célébré ton jus.
N'en perdons pas la coutume.
Seconde moi,
Que peut sans toi
Ma plume?
Coule à longs traits
Dans mon épais
Volume.
Viens, mon cher patron,
Sois mon Apollon,
Viens, mon cher ami! Que j' t' hume!

Grâce à la liqueur
Qui lave mon cœur,
Nul souci ne me consume.
De ce vin gris
Que je chéris
L'écume!
Lorsque j'en boi
Quel feu chez moi
S'allume!
Nectar enchanteur,
Tu fais mon bonheur;
Viens, mon cher ami! Que j' t' hume!

Champagne divin,
Du plus noir chagrin
Tu dissipes l'amertume.
Tu sais mûrir,
Tu sais guérir
Le rhume.
Quel goût flatteur
Ta douce odeur
Parfume!
Pour tant de bienfaits
Et pour tant d'attraits
Viens, mon cher ami! Que j' t' hume!

Here is a less quaint and artificial arrangement of rhyme which, however, is not without its charms:

J'aime Bacchus, j'aime Manon,
 Tous deux partagent ma tendresse:
 Tous deux ont troublé ma raison
 Par une aimable et douce ivresse.
 Ah! qu'elle est belle! Ah! qu'il est bon!
 C'est le refrain de ma chanson.

Quand le vin coule dans mon cœur
 Et que ma mignonne est présente,
 Je ressens une vive ardeur
 Et dans un doux transport je chante,
 Ah! etc.

Nanette en me brûlant d'amour
 Me rend le vin plus agréable;
 Le vin par un juste retour
 La rend à mes yeux plus aimable.
 Ah! etc.

En partageant ainsi mes vœux
 Mon cœur en est plus à son aise;
 Quand il me manque l'un des deux
 L'autre me soulage et m'appaise.
 Ah! etc.

De Manon si j'avais le cœur,
 Lui seul pourroit me satisfaire,
 Mais ses refus ou sa rigueur
 Me rendent le vin nécessaire.
 Ah! etc.

Des maux qu'elle me fait souffrir
 C'est ce nectar qui me délivre.
 Vingt fois elle m'a fait mourir,
 Vingt fois Bacchus m'a fait revivre!
 Ah! etc.

Here, again, is an epigram, than which many worse have found their way into anthologies, old and new:

Lorsque le chantre de la Thrace
 Dans les sombres lieux descendit,
 On punit d'abord son audace
 Par sa femme qu'on lui rendit.
 Mais bientôt par une justice
 Qui fit honneur au dieu des morts,
 Ce dieu lui reprit Eurydice
 Pour prix de ses divins accords.

Marmontel called him "le La Fontaine du vaudeville," and, bold as is the appellation, it is perhaps not

destitute of appropriateness. Panard really had, and did not affect, the curious mixture of simplicity and wit which distinguished his more famous predecessor. His funeral discourse on the unfortunate Gallet, to whose tomb he had been paying a farewell visit, is an instance. "Ils me l'ont mis, monsieur," said he to a sympathising acquaintance who met him in the street, and inquired the reason of his evident disquietude; "ils me l'ont mis sous une gouttière! Lui qui depuis l'âge de la raison n'a pas bu un seul verre d'eau!" It would be an entire misconception of the character of the man to see in this the sort of ill-timed joke that Chamfort or Rulhière might have made. It is exactly the idea which might occur to anybody, but which no one but a child would express without some malicious intent.

There are, of course, different estimates of the value of childishness in full-grown men. Panard, however, is at least interesting as the last genuine specimen of it in a literature where its manifestations had once been many. In other contemporary singers there is, indeed, *insouciance*; but it is *insouciance* which has been the subject of a great deal of *souci*. They say, "I don't care about getting into the Academy, not I," and they proceed to prove this by laboriously attacking, with Piron, in a hundred epigrams the institution which is beneath their notice. They say, "I was born gay," and they keep with Collé a private journal written, not with ink, but with pure gall. There is nothing of this about Panard. His heaven is, indeed, a somewhat curiously placed heaven, for it is to be found in a well-stocked cellar. But no believer in the most mystical of religions could celebrate the belief more conscientiously, or with a more cheerful and unhesitating devotion.

VI

ERNEST RENAN [1880]

EVERY one who has read Mérimée's *Lettres à une Inconnue* must remember some not wholly complimentary passages respecting M. Renan. There is no need to quote the passages here; an allusion to them is enough in order to help us to formulate, by a process of contrast, the character of M. Renan as a critic and writer. Mérimée was himself, in a literary sense if not personally, the most exquisitely accomplished cynic that ever existed. The way in which, throughout his not very bulky work, whole schools and regions of thought and wit are represented by some little masterpiece and then apparently dismissed as of no further interest to the author, is unique in literature. The way in which there appears, in the beauty of all these representations, something sinister and as it were inhuman, is equally unique. Both in pure fantasy pieces like the *Vénus d'Ille* and in pictures of modern society like *La Double Méprise*, as well as in more astonishing reproductions of the harsher sides of the past as *La Jacquerie*, the same literary perfection and the same cynical force are apparent. To every one who has, in however faint a measure, the tendency to look at life from the sarcastic side, Mérimée must always be the object of an immense admiration. But to such a writer himself nothing could be more unwelcome than anything even approaching what is irreverently called in English "gush,"—than the tendency not merely to think nobly and hopefully of life, and to dwell upon its more amiable aspects, but to dress it up in bright colours

and agreeable forms, and to express these in somewhat effusive and voluble language, full of unction and of appeals to the heart, the sentiments, and the religious principle. I by no means give this as a description of M. Renan, but it is probably a sufficiently true description of Mérimée's M. Renan; and it was upon this subjective being, no doubt, that the author of *Colomba* vented his spleen. It ought to be remembered that the attacked person took his revenge in a most gentleman-like correction. In the next volume of the *Origines* he alluded to Petronius as "Un Mérimée sceptique au ton froid et exquis, qui nous a laissé un roman d'une verve, d'une finesse accomplie en même temps que d'une corruption raffinée." The comparison is by no means ungenerous, and withal singularly true. Now it is hardly a paradox to say that in order to detect the character of any man or writer one cannot do better than take the reports of his enemies. By stripping these of malignity and exaggeration, by substituting the quality for the defect and the mean for the excess, such unfavourable accounts, unless they come from wholly untrustworthy or incompetent sources, may be made to yield a much larger amount of truth than the amiable but often vague and random language of panegyrists and partisans. Least of all was such a faculty as Mérimée's likely to go altogether astray, though it might very easily overpass the goal. The truth is that the literary and philosophical characteristics of M. Renan (for with matters theological we have nothing to do here) are very strongly marked, and for our time by no means common. In his attitude towards books and men he stands apart from any other school or individual of his own country and of the Continent, though perhaps it would not be difficult to name an English critic who, with many points of

difference, had some points of agreement with him¹. To those who simply consider him in the light of an assailant or defender of certain theological or ecclesiastical ideas, these peculiarities are necessarily invisible. Let us see if, by keeping theology apart, they can be made to emerge into view.

It is always interesting and instructive to compare the earliest and the latest work of men of literary distinction. The earliest work of M. Renan's known to me—putting aside mere college exercises—is the article on “L'État des Esprits en 1849”; the latest², omitting *L'Église Chrétienne* as a simple continuation of a work planned and moulded twenty years ago, is *Caliban*. Between the enthusiasm of five-and-twenty and the quiet scepticism of fifty-five there is, of course, a good deal of difference; but the main features of the author's mind, and even to some extent of his literary style, are identical enough. There is the same disbelief in religious and political nostrums, the same preference for a somewhat vague elevation and expansion of heart, the same contempt of utilitarianism on the one side, and of the merely æsthetic attitude towards art and literature on the other. Between the youthful appeal in favour of “la pauvre humanité assise, morne et silencieuse, sur le bord du chemin,” and the ingenious parody of Shakespeare which scandalised grave and precise democrats long afterwards, their author has something more than a fair amount of work done to show. I need take no account of works of pure erudition, though the treatise *De l'Origine du Langage* is not unimportant from the general point of view, because it shows, in a comparatively neutral field, the

¹ I meant—I need, perhaps, hardly say it—Mr Matthew Arnold (1924).

² Latest in 1880, the original date of this essay. The subsequent work will be found summarised *infra* (1924).

same reluctance to adopt materialist explanations and to admit the all-powerful action of circumstances as distinguished from innate powers, which characterises M. Renan elsewhere. The catalogue of his more properly literary work may be limited to the monograph on Averroes, to the four or five volumes of Essays collected and reprinted under different titles, and to the six volumes of the *Origins of Christianity*.

The book on Averroes, unless taken with the author's Semitic studies, and perhaps also with the general history of free thought and revolt against religious dogma, does not seem to be particularly germane to his tastes. It is, however, an excellent book in its way, and the labour of its preparation must, beyond a doubt, have had an excellent disciplinary effect on M. Renan's style and manner. Inclined, as he most undoubtedly is, to be exuberant rather than the reverse, if he had given himself very early to easy literature, which requires much writing, little reading, and no research properly so called, the effect could hardly have failed to be unfavourable. Combining, as the book does, a bibliographic study of considerable complexity, an analysis of an extensive work, and a rapid survey of a long period of subsequent history, the amount of labour which it represents is very far out of proportion to its bulk. There are passages here and there, moreover, which distinctly enough foreshadow the manner and method of the author of the *Vie de Jésus*, such as the section on the curious myth of the *Tres Impostores*, and that describing Petrarch's tribulations with the Venetian Averroists. The scattered essays are naturally much more fertile of light on the character of their author than a work where the plan and almost the contents were traced out for him by his subject. His various studies in religious history may be taken partly

as sketches for the finished work which was to come, but still more as protreptic discourses put forward to dispose the public to receive that work with understanding and favour, or else critical appreciations of different forms of the religious spirit. The least happy of these is probably that on Channing, in which the author, true to a bad habit of his countrymen, seems to start with a preconceived archetypal Englishman or American (for it is much the same to him) and to reason downwards. More interesting still are the papers united under the heading *Questions Contemporaines*, which for the most part exhibit in various forms that ardent desire for an improvement in the higher education of his country, which is one of M. Renan's most honourable characteristics, and which, before his old age, he had already lived to see in several ways fulfilled.

Nor can the political sketches entitled *Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale* be omitted if a full estimate is to be formed of their author. The famous correspondence with the author of the *Leben Jesu*, while perhaps it exposes only too clearly the sorrowful chances that now as in other days await the too faithful believer in sweet reasonableness, is at least as valuable as a moral tell-tale as it is honourable to the writer. Two long studies, one having the general title of the book, the other headed *De la Monarchie Constitutionnelle en France*, exhibit not only such practical political ideas as the author has formed, but also a very favourite notion of his, that great moral and intellectual achievements unfit a nation for playing a prominent political part, and that in this order of thought, as in another, it must lose its life to save it. Finally, M. Renan's more purely personal and literary studies show less an ability on his part to put himself in the place of the subjects criticised, than an ability to improve them in

the ecclesiastical sense, that is to say, to use their history and peculiarities for the purpose of illustrating his own ethical, religious, and political ideas. Interesting, however, as are these lesser pieces to the student, and to all who care for idiosyncrasy of work as opposed to mere volume and importance of subject, they can hardly be regarded even now, and will almost certainly not be regarded hereafter, as anything more than a vestibule and precinct to the book which has occupied the prime of the author's life, and upon which, beyond all doubt, he would himself prefer to base his chances of fame.

It may be questioned whether any writer ever manifested a more distinct and uniform personality of thought and style than that which M. Renan maintained through the six volumes of his greatest work, the publication of which extended over twenty years. The first impression that the *Vie de Jésus* and its successors produce on critical readers, whether they be orthodox or unorthodox, is in all probability identical, nor can it be said that this impression is ever wholly removed. Nothing can, to all appearance, be more hopelessly uncritical and arbitrary than the proceeding. To take a connected narrative and reject such details as happen not to square with preconceived ideas, while admitting the others; to reject a prophecy as obviously false, and take it up next minute as a trustworthy history of the events *a posteriori*; to see in a reported miracle, not an imposture, but an innocent distortion of some ordinary fact—all this seems at first sight to partake decidedly more of the spirit of *Dichtung* than of *Wahrheit*. The historian has also, in common with many other historians of the latter half of the nineteenth century, a most remarkable habit of building up whole characters and histories out of slight

personal traits. St James the Less, if he had foreseen that the callosities on his knees and the gold plate on his forehead would bring him into such trouble, would infallibly have discarded the latter and adopted a cushion to obviate the former. The unfortunate Claudius Lysias may fairly complain of the accusation of "stupidity," founded upon one or two casual allusions which certainly do not bear that sense to all readers; while, on the other hand, Barnabas has to thank M. Renan for favours received in return for a very slight historical consideration. But before long the rough places become tolerably smooth to an intelligent walker. The object of the book, as a defence of principles and modes of character which seem to the writer of the first importance to the world, soon makes itself apparent. M. Renan's two wings, as the mediæval allegorists would say, are the abstractions which are called, in the technical terms of theology and morals, spirituality and unction. In his use of both of these there are points which are decidedly less akin to the English temperament, and to such half-English temperaments as Mérimée's, than to the softer and more feminine temper which is so largely represented in the average Frenchman. The words of the hymn, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," express the attraction which the critic has found on the moral side in the founder of the Christian religion; the words "the kingdom of God" represent his attraction on the purely intellectual side. He has inherited from that religion, or has made up for himself (whichever phrase may be preferred), an ideal of unworldliness as distinguished from the self-seeking and materialism of modern life, of mild and impartial affection as opposed to the stormy passions or cold indifference of the individual.

With this *a priori* conception he has started, and

it is this that shapes his handling of his work. In the earliest volume the sentimental side of the matter has most play, and it is still most remarkable therein. Without being very cynical, it is permissible to feel the abundance of such adjectives as "délicieux," "charmant," "ravissant," "enivrant," "exquis," as rather cloying. With *Les Apôtres* things improve from this point of view. The sentimental side of the matter is perforce kept in the background, and the "kingdom of God," the battle of spiritualism against materialism of all sorts, comes more to the front. It is in these later volumes, moreover, that the remarkable art of the writer becomes chiefly manifest. To weave a series of fragmentary notices, many of which his critical (or uncritical) method compels him to reject, into a connected narrative, to keep up the contrasted importance of the different parts, and in doing this to keep the double end, the inculcation of spirituality and of moral beauty, in view, without wearying the reader, is a task of sufficient difficulty in itself. But when it is remembered that to the immense majority of readers the story is already familiar, that they have from earliest youth been taught to expect and welcome it in one form only, and that they are (supposing other prepossessions absent) as much disposed as children are to resent alteration and addition in a favourite tale, the difficulty becomes immensely complicated. Lastly, when we add to all this that the narrative has perforce to take the shape of something like a perpetual commentary, usually the most arid of literary forms, the hardness of the task is raised to very nearly the highest point, and it is clear that only literary faculty of a very remarkable kind could enable the author to discharge it.

The treatment of the subject is of course to a great

extent conditioned by its nature, yet it is at the same time shaped by the idiosyncrasy of the practitioner. Of the fortunes of the Christian Church, from the date of the Crucifixion to the beginning of the third century, neither document nor tradition, orthodox or unorthodox, gives any connected survey. On the other hand, an immense body of literature of all kinds, sacred and profane, Jewish, Christian, and Pagan, religious, historical, and philosophical, survives containing the materials, the *pièces* of such a history. A critic of the sober school, whether belonging to the merely dry-as-dust order or to the product-of-the-circumstances sect, would assuredly find too many gaps to be filled, more or less conjecturally, to please him. Biographers and historians of this class like a subject upon which the full light of day has been thrown, where there is abundant material, and where the task is little more than one of skilful combination and intelligent interpreting. On the other hand, the merely superficial theoriser would find himself hampered by the multitude of scrappy details, jutting up like the tops of submarine rocks, useless and almost impossible for purposes of landing and agriculture, but sufficient to render careless navigation exceedingly dangerous. Many an ingenious theory has been upset before now by a troublesome and sterile fact of this kind. But M. Renan happens to combine in remarkably full measure the talent for conjecture and the talent for patient research. The way in which he has followed up in courageous dives the submarine world which connects, or might very conceivably connect, the emerging points of fact or tradition, is a triumph of the combined method. The book, like most other histories where the imagination is strongly represented, and perhaps with greater justice than in any other case, has been called

a romance. It would be fairer to call it a conjectural restoration of history. All conjectural restorations incline to the romantic.

A detail worthy of notice, in estimating M. Renan's choice and use of his materials, is his extreme predilection for the apocryphal sacred books, both Jewish and Christian, and especially for the apocryphal apocalypses. Since the alteration of the lectionary and the disuse of the custom of binding up the apocrypha with the Old and New Testaments, it is probable that such of these singular documents as used to be recognised by the Church of England are unknown even to some persons professedly observant of religious matters in this country. Some of them again, such as the Book of Enoch and the *Shepherd* of Hermas (which, by the way, is not strictly an apocryphal book), have never among us had even this chance of recognition. As far as literary merits go there can be no doubt that this obsolescence is a great pity. There are not many more delightful books of their class than the Wisdom of Solomon, than Ecclesiasticus, and than the Fourth Book of Esdras. To all these "oubliés et dédaignés" M. Renan has given his particular attention, and his analyses of many of them, notably of the *Shepherd* and the Fourth Book of Esdras, are not merely among the most attractive passages of his book, but are also excellent examples of literary abstracts. There are indeed many points about these books which appeal to such a critic. They are perhaps more saturated than the canonical books with the Semitic spirit, in that excited and recalcitrant form which it assumed in the days immediately preceding and immediately following the Christian era; they are full of vague but poetical imagery; they lend themselves in the most obliging way to the conjectural interpretations in reference to

historical events of which M. Renan is so fond. Moreover they are in many cases romantic pictures of more or less private life which supply abundance of local colour as well as of information as to modes of thought. Thus they are the most fertile of quarries to a patient worker in mosaic, the most precious of colour-stores to such a painter as M. Renan, who has set himself to depict on a vast scale the whole spiritual and emotional life and movement of a time such as the first two centuries. Of the strictly narrative portions of the work produced on these principles and from these sources, it would be impossible here to give examples, nor is it necessary; but a few short extracts may perhaps help to illustrate the character of M. Renan's style and also of his thought. The first shall be taken from the eloquent opening of *Les Apôtres*, in which the author sets forth the subjective view of the Resurrection:

But love and enthusiasm know no such thing as situations without an issue. They laugh at the impossible, and rather than abandon hope, will do violence to reality. Many well-remembered words of the Master, especially those in which he had foretold his future advent, could be interpreted in the sense of a resurrection from the tomb. Such a belief was, besides, so natural that the mere faith of the disciples might have sufficed for its production. The great prophets Enoch and Elijah had not tasted death. The belief was even beginning to obtain that the patriarchs and the chief men of the elder dispensation were not really dead, and that their bodies lay in their sepulchres at Hebron still inhabited by life and by the soul. It was certain to happen in the case of Jesus, as it has happened in the case of all men who have arrested the attention of their fellows. The world, accustomed to attribute to them superhuman virtues, cannot admit that they have undergone the unjust and revolting law of death. At the moment when Mahomet expired, Omar quitted the tent, sword in hand, and threatened to strike the head off any one who dared to affirm that the prophet had ceased to live. Death is so unreasonable a thing when it falls on men of great heart or great genius, that the people refuse to believe such an error of nature possible. Heroes do not die. For is not that the true existence which is prolonged in the memory of those who love us? The adored Master had for years filled the

little world of his companions with joy and hope. Could they consent to leave him to moulder in the tomb? No! He had lived too long and too intimately in the hearts of his followers for it not to be affirmed after his death that he was still alive for ever.

Here is a passage dealing less with psychology, and more with social theories:

The glory of the Jewish nation is to have proclaimed this principle [of social fraternity], whence arose the downfall of the elder states, and which is itself not destined to perish. The Jewish Law is social, not political; the prophets, the apocalyptic writers, advocate revolutions of a social, not of a political character. In the first half of the first century the Jews, brought face to face with profane civilisation, are animated with but one idea—to refuse the advantages of the Roman Law, a law atheistic, philosophic, productive merely of general equality, and to proclaim the excellence of their own theocratic law, which gives a religious and moral complexion to society. All Jewish thinkers, such as Philo and Josephus, hold that the Law is the secret of happiness. The laws of other peoples will have justice done; it is no matter to them whether the people be good or happy. The Jewish Law, on the contrary, descends into the minutest particulars of moral education. Christianity is a development of the same idea.... Every Church is a community where each has his claims on all, where there must be no one indigent, no one wicked, and where, in consequence, there is a mutual right of supervision and command. Primitive Christianity might be called a great association of the poor, a heroic effort against egotism based on the principle that the claims of the individual go no farther than to the absolutely necessary, and that superfluities belong to those who need. Between such a spirit and the spirit of Roman polity a war to the death is inevitable, while on the other hand Christianity can only succeed in ruling the world by modifying seriously its natural tendencies and its original programme.

Yet the needs which Christianity represents will abide eternally. Community of living, by the second half of the Middle Ages, having been abused by an intolerant Church, the monastery having become too often a feudal institution or a barrack of dangerous and fanatical soldiery, the modern spirit has shown itself unfavourable to it. We have forgotten that it is in the common life that the human soul has tasted most joy. The psalm, "How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," has ceased to be our song. But when modern individualism has brought forth its final fruits, when humanity, dwarfed and saddened and become impotent, shall return to great institutions and manly discipline, when our mean society of citizens, our world of pygmies, shall have been beaten off by the heroic and idealist elements of humanity,

then the common life will regain its value. Science and a crowd of other great things will be organised monastically with a continuity independent of mere fleshly inheritance. The importance attributed by our time to the family will diminish, and egotism, the essential principle of large societies, will no longer suffice great souls. A league of otherwise opposed forces will be formed against vulgarity. The words of Jesus, and the ideas of the Middle Ages on the subject of poverty, will once more appear reasonable. We shall understand how the mere possession of private property was once held to be an inferiority, and how the founders of mysticism argued for centuries whether Jesus had possessed "things which perish in the using." The crotchets of the Franciscans will become serious social problems, and the splendid ideal traced by the author of the Acts will be written as a prophetic revelation on the gates of the paradise of humanity.

After this eloquent prophecy of some of the things (more satisfactory at any rate than the restoration of Picrochole) which will happen *à la venue des coquecigrues*, let us take a picture of a more historical character:

What characterised the religion of Greece in old days, what characterises it still, is its lack of the infinite and the vague; the tenderness and the feminine softness, the deep religious sentiment of the German and Celtic races, is wanting in the true Hellenes. The piety of the orthodox Greek consists in ritual and in outward observances. His churches, often of sufficient elegance, have none of the element of the terrible which distinguishes a Gothic minster. In this Eastern Christianity there are no tears, no prayers, no inward compunction. Even burials have a certain gaiety about them; they are celebrated in the evening, at set of sun, when the shadows are long, with soft music and the display of bright colours. The fanatical gravity of the Latins displeases these lively, light-minded, untroubled races. The sick man himself is not depressed; death approaches him cheerily, and things around him smile. This is the secret of the divine gaiety of Homer and Plato; even the tale of Socrates' death in the *Phædo* has hardly a touch of sadness. To blossom, to bear fruit, that is life, and why ask for more? It is a superficial people, taking life as a thing with nothing supernatural in it, with no background. Such a simplicity of attitude depends to a great extent upon the climate, the purity of the air, the exhilaration which the mere breathing of it gives. But it depends also on the splendidly idealist instincts of the Hellenic race. A mere nothing suffices in Greece to produce the contentment which the sight of beauty causes. A tree, a flower, a lizard, a tortoise, awaking the remembrance of the thousand metamorphoses sung by the poets:—a tiny rivulet; a cranny in the rock dignified

as a cave of the nymphs; a well with a cup on the brink; a strait like that at Poros, so narrow that the butterflies flit across it, yet navigable by mighty ships; orange and cypress groves that throw their shadow over the sea; a clump of pines on the rocks:—any of these is enough. To walk at night in the gardens, to listen to the cicale, to sit in the moonlight and play the flute, to drink of the mountain spring, bringing with one bread and fish and a flask of wine, with a song to accompany the repast; to crown the head with flowers and the door lintels with leaves, at the family festivals; on public feast days to carry the thyrsus decked with foliage, to dance all day long, to play with tame kids—such are the pleasures of the Greek, pleasures of a poor and thrifty race, always young, inhabiting a delightful country, finding its joys in itself and in the goods the gods provide. The Theocritean idyl was in all Hellenic countries a simple fact; Greece always delighted in this elegant and amiable style of minor poetry, exact to life in her own case, in the case of all other countries stupid and unreal. Good-humour and joy in living are the special peculiarities of the Greek. He does not construe *indulgere genio* after the fashion of the Englishman's heavy intoxication, of the Frenchman's coarse disport; it is with him a simple result of reflection that Nature is good, and that it is right to follow her. To the Greek, indeed, Nature is a mistress of good taste, an instructress in virtue and rectitude: the notion of concupiscence, of a temptation by nature to do ill, is to him a contradiction. The fancy for dress which distinguishes the Palikari, and which shows itself so innocently in young Greek girls, is not the pompous vanity of the barbarian, the silly forwardness of the citizen's wife, puffed up with a low-born pride, it is the simple sentiment of unaffected youth feeling itself the heir of the inventors of beauty.

One more short piece of a somewhat sterner character may serve to complete this miniature anthology and to show how M. Renan can, without effort or grandiloquence, convey the idea of the mysterious and the terrible:

Since the Jewish nation, in a kind of despair, had taken to reflecting upon its destiny, the imagination of the people had directed itself with affectionate concentration to the ancient prophets. Now of all the personages of the past whose memory came like a dream in the night to agitate and excite the nation, the greatest was Elijah. This giant among the prophets in his savage solitude on Carmel, sharing the life of wild beasts, dwelling in the hollows of the rocks, whence from time to time he descended like a thunderbolt to make and unmake kings, had become, by a series of successive metamorphoses, a kind of supernatural being, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, who had never tasted death.

It was a general belief that Elijah would return and restore Israel. The austere life he had led, the terrible memories which he had left, and which still abide in the imagination of the East¹, his threatening image, which even now seems to spread terror and death, his whole legend, full of vengeance and fear, produced a lively impression on the mind, and stamped, as it were, a birthmark on the results of popular throes. Whosoever aspired to active eminence among the people was bound to imitate Elijah; and, as the solitary life had been the distinguishing peculiarity of this prophet, it became customary to look on the "man of God" as a hermit. It was imagined that all holy personages had had their period of penance, of austerity, of life in regions far from towns, and a retirement to the desert became thus the condition and prelude of lofty destinies.

I have given the note as well as the text here because it illustrates well the manner in which M. Renan builds his most literary passages on fragments of fact. A less accomplished artist would probably have dragged the pasha and the heads into the text, for the sake of emphasis and colour.

In this work M. Renan must be regarded as one of the class of picturesque historians, a class of writers from whom the world has suffered many things in these last days. But he is a picturesque historian with a great many differences, and almost every one of these differences is in his favour. Eclectic and, to a great extent, imaginative as his method is, he can rarely be accused of actual exaggeration, or of affecting the picturesque for the picturesque's sake. He is not in the habit of basing rhetorical generalisations upon nothing at all, merely to add to the forcible character of his picture. There is a sobriety about him which the weary reader, tired of fireworks, in vain demands from certain historians of the same general character in England. Moreover, his picturesqueness, such as it

¹ [Abdallah, the ferocious Pasha of Acre, nearly died of fright after beholding the Prophet in a dream standing erect on the Mount. In the pictures of the Christian churches the portrait of Elijah is surrounded with severed heads, and the Mussulmans themselves fear him. *M. Renan's Note.*]

is, is in the strictest keeping with the general plan and purport of his book, and results logically from the principles which he has set before him. "Que je voudrais," he says somewhere of the author of the *Imitatio Christi*, "être peintre, pour le montrer tel que je le conçois, doux et recueilli, assis en son fauteuil de chêne, dans le beau costume des bénédictins de Mont Cassin." The assumption as to the authorship of the famous book may be matter of argument, but the sentence is the key to all the author's own picturesque passages; they are resorted to simply to show us the person or the scene, such as the historian conceives it, and are thus illuminations, not squibs and crackers let off for the purpose of dazzling and crackling. Sometimes, of course, the subjectivity of view is rather excessive; it is certainly a hard saying when one finds M. Renan pronouncing Ecclesiastes "le seul livre aimable" that the Jewish spirit has ever produced. The Preacher is delightful reading no doubt, but amiable is about the last epithet that one would feel inclined to give him. However, everybody must see with his own eyes, and the most that outsiders can do is to lend spectacles to the short-sighted. M. Renan, if in this particular instance his glasses hardly suit our sight, is usually one of the most serviceable of opticians. With the principles that human nature, due difference being made for varieties of race, is everywhere and at all times pretty much the same—that outward circumstances may modify, but cannot wholly determine its action—that happiness, moral good, and intellectual cultivation are the objects of life, he has made edification and delight equally the objects of his book. He has, indeed, stated his main theory with sufficient clearness in the preface to his *Essais de Morale et de Critique*. "Morality is the one thing eminently serious

and true, and by itself it suffices to give meaning and direction to life. Impenetrable veils hide from us the secret of this world, whose reality is at once irresistible and oppressive. Philosophy and science will for ever pursue without ever attaining the formula of this Proteus, unlimited by reason, inexpressible in language. But there is one foundation which no doubt can shake, and in which man will ever find a firm ground amidst his uncertainties; good is good and evil is evil. No system is necessary to enable us to hate the one and love the other; and it is in this sense that faith and love, possessing no seeming connection with the intellect, are the true base of moral certainty, and the only means possessed by man of understanding in some slight measure the problem of his origin and destiny."

Some notable failings and dislikes of M. Renan's give us important side-lights on his literary and critical character. One such is his attitude towards the Middle Ages. He has written and read about them more than most people, and it requires some courage to bring a charge of short-coming against the author of *Averroès*, and of the excellent discourse on the Art of the Fourteenth Century in France. Yet it is soon tolerably clear to an attentive reader, and perfectly clear to one who has some knowledge of mediæval literature, that M. Renan is out of sympathy with the Ages of Faith. He is even so far out of sympathy with them that he fails altogether to understand them in some important points, which have nothing whatever to do with theology or Church history. We rub our eyes when we come to the statement (in the preface of *Averroès et l'Averroïsme*), that the Middle Ages, "intellectually speaking, represent nothing but gropings after a return to antiquity." It

would be safer to affirm the exact contrary. In hardly a single great instance of the intellectual development of the Middle Ages is there any real affinity with the spirit of classicism. With characteristic and uncritical docility they sometimes borrowed classical forms, dressed themselves up in scraps of classical ore, proposed classical masters as objects of admiration and reverence. But in reality the two are poles asunder. The author of *Roland* is separated from the author of the *Iliad*, the author of *Lancelot du Lac* from the author of the *Odyssey*, Audefroy le Bastard from Horace, Anselm from Aristotle, Villehardouin from Thucydides, by a gulf which no possible "gropings" could traverse.

Accordingly, whenever M. Renan deals with the Middle Ages, and especially with Scholasticism, he is unsatisfactory, because he is unsympathetic. Nor is the reason of this by any means far to seek; it is not the religious side of the Middle Ages that repels him, but their moral and æsthetic side. He seems to miss in them the sunny aspect which attracts him alike in things Eastern and in things Greek. The strong shadows that give the character and, to some persons, the attraction of Gothic architecture, make him shiver. If there is any part of Europe during those times on which he looks with satisfaction it is Spain, Provence, and perhaps Italy—all lands that love to lie in the sun—not his own Brittany and northern France, and England and Germany, with their gloom and their combativeness, and the absence of rose-pink and sky-blue in their pictures. In particular M. Renan has evidently a strong dislike to fighting. For such a master of description his sketch of the Siege of Jerusalem is comparatively tame, and he passes over the Battle of Bedriacum—which still awaits its picturesque historian, though surely no battle of the nations ever

better deserved one—with a hasty shudder at its butchery. It may be suspected that M. Renan, patriotic as he is, by no means shares the modern admiration for “l’Épopée Française,” and that the *Chansons de Gestes*, with the ceaseless ring of their assonances, clashing like lance on shield and sword on helmet, seem to him distinctly barbarous. He is more at home in the Arthurian legends, for which any native of Brittany must feel a certain reverence. But on the whole the presence of the warlike spirit, against which he again and again testifies, is too strong in the Middle Ages for M. Renan. He says somewhere, “J’aime le moyen âge,” but I venture to doubt whether his affection is spontaneous and genuine.

Another interesting point in the critic’s mental disposition is his attitude towards philosophy of the more abstract kind. Here again, wherever he has to touch on such matters, an absence of sympathy is apparent—strikingly, for instance, in the account of the Gnostic sects in the last volume of the *Origines*. To any one who has a weakness for speculation, there is something especially fascinating in the fragmentary notices of Basilides and Valentinus, which have come down to us in the sorriest possible condition in which any such notices could possibly come, involved, that is to say, in the partisan refutations of their adversaries. To these unfortunates M. Renan devotes indeed some admirable pages, but they do not inspire him with half the interest that is excited by, let us say, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, that curious mixture of the devout gallantry of the seventeenth century with the apocalyptic fancies of the second. Not many men have been more in contact with Scholastic literature than M. Renan, but here again the fantastic attraction which that literature has for some people seems to exercise no influence over

him. He evidently does not feel the magnetism of unbridled logic which sometimes tempts the reader in moments of weakness to devote the rest of his life to *Quæstiones Quodlibetales*, and such like ware. His allusions, not merely in his book on Averroes but elsewhere, to Scholasticism, are possibly just, but certainly harsh. Its absence of form and colour and human interest seems to repel him. This being so, it is not surprising that he should speak of the later philosophy of Germany with respect indeed, but hardly with affection, and still less with enthusiasm. Hegel certainly cannot have much attraction for one who is proof against Basilides and Erigena and Occam. Even in his handling of Spinoza the dialectic element is kept out of sight in a very singular manner. Some of the contents of the *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques* may seem to contradict this view. But the greater part of that curious book appears to me to represent no permanent or deep-rooted convictions of its author. Events had for a moment upset M. Renan's equanimity, and he retired upon philosophy. Moreover, in the study which concludes it (*La Métaphysique et son Avenir*), his more habitual attitude towards such questions reappears distinctly enough. Indeed it is in this respect that the practical aspect of M. Renan's mind is most evident. He has his Utopias, no doubt; indeed he is very largely estated in those shadowy regions. But they are on the whole very practical Utopias, and the inhabitants are more occupied with conduct than with speculation, with their duties towards their neighbours than with the contemplation of their own interiors. In the *Royaume de Dieu* of which he is so fond, it does not appear that Barbara and Celarent will occupy a very high place among the thrones and dominations recognised by the constitution.

Yet one more of these inquiries into the dislikes of the subject. I do not know that anywhere in a dozen pages a writer has thrown more light upon his own individuality than M. Renan has thrown in the little piece entitled "La Théologie de Béranger," which may be found reprinted at the end of the *Questions Contemporaines*. It is, perhaps, the only occasion on which he becomes literally violent and intolerant. In the pieces which concern his own grievances, in those which regard the not very handsome treatment he received during the unlucky Strauss correspondence, there is nothing half so sharp as in this review of "Le Béranger des Familles." For persons mischievously disposed there is something extremely comic in the spectacle of one of the most benevolent and amiable writers of the last part of the century completely losing his temper and his charity with one of the most benevolent and amiable writers of the first part. As happens, moreover, in nineteen cases out of twenty, when the critic ceases to be impassive he loses his critical faculty. I certainly do not agree with those who, knowing French literature only partially, hold exaggerated notions of Béranger's excellence. But there is something more in the author of songs which range from *Le Grenier* to *Les Fous* than the mere vulgarity which is all or nearly all that M. Renan can see in him. In his repetition of the old preference of the insipid pastorals and jargon-ditties of Désaugiers to the work of Béranger, I cannot but think that M. Renan makes a capital error. But this very error is respectable enough in its way, and certainly characteristic. Béranger's Chauvinism, his affectation of the unpleasant but purely conventional style which is called in French *grivois*, his adoption of the stock French habit—as old as the Fabliaux—of delighting in the degradation of feminine character,

are all things that M. Renan cannot away with. Doubtless, too, they are all very bad things. If the present object were the rehabilitation of Béranger—a task which is superfluous, and for which I have no particular inclination—a good deal would have to be said on the other side. But at present the subject is not Béranger, but his critic, and that critic's idiosyncrasy. It is easy to see in this protest the outcry of offended spiritualism and delicacy indignant at seeing its gods hobnobbed with, its ideals of the eternal-feminine exchanged for the less amiable if more easily found types of the baggage-waggon and the pavements, and its notions of duty, liberty, peace, and justice passed by, in order that homage may be paid to the Napoleonic legend, and that militarism may be held up as the first instinct of man. These three crimes are of all things most distasteful to M. Renan, and unluckily they are among the things most prominent in Béranger's works, at least in the more popular portion of them. Once more our author has told us what he is, by telling us the persons with whom he does not live.

If this account of the principles of M. Renan's literary and critical character be correct, it is evident that it stands in striking contrast to two other schools which have between them divided most of the critical talent of France during the last half century. In the first place it is far removed—to the extent, indeed, of complete antipathy—from the purely indifferent criticism of form rather than matter in life and literature which has been so strongly represented during that time. Of such criticism there have of course been many varieties, differing with the idiosyncrasy of the critics. The sarcastic and, in a way, severe attitude of Mérimée is not the good-natured and purely apolaustic attitude of Gautier. But in all this school there may be said to

be sometimes an impatience, sometimes a dislike, sometimes a simple neglect or omission, of the moral view of questions of literature or conduct. On the other hand M. Renan's process stands in equally sharp contrast to the still more popular method of Sainte-Beuve, one side of which has been developed to an extent which may fairly be called exaggerated by M. Taine. This latter method, as thus exaggerated, consists, it need hardly be said, in treating the man and his work as for the most part an effect and not a cause. Its practitioners, in order to explain their patient, set to work to examine his *milieu* in every possible way, and, at any rate professedly, are content to accept the results of their examination as an explanation. The spirit of the age, the character of the surroundings, the influences of grandfathers and grandmothers, the style of education, living, and so forth, are taken as the data out of which the result is to be got. It would not be true, of course, to say that moral considerations exercise no influence over this class of critic, or that he has no likes or dislikes. But his likes and his dislikes are not ostensibly governed by any *a priori* principles, and concern the individual criticised less than the influences which are supposed to have produced him.

With M. Renan the case is quite different. He has so much of Cousin in him (of Cousin, of whom he never fails to speak with a somewhat exaggerated respect) that the big words *Vrai*, *Beau*, and *Bien*, or, if it be preferred, the great things which these big words signify, are always present before him. As a man or a book happens to fall in or to fall out with these notions of his, so the man or the book is judged. Nor is he apt to attribute much force to the product-of-the-century theory. An accurate student of history is

never likely to ignore the general tendency of periods. But in the formation of that general tendency M. Renan is willing to allow a great deal more force to the influence, and especially to the moral influence, of individuals than most other critics of the day. It is thus that in his principal work he is continually striving to hold up the personality of the actors clearly to view, even when there is the very smallest evidence of that personality to go upon. In judging personalities, too, he never lets himself be carried away by any fascinations of the paradoxical ultra-literary sort. He has perfectly well exposed the oddities of Nero's character, but those oddities have not inclined him to be lenient to the implacable, beautiful tyrant. If he is disposed to let Nero off at all gently, it is not because of his grandiose fancies, his unquiet searching after some new and infinite form of evil, but because Poppæa and Acte were to all appearance really attached to him. In this point even Nero falls among the things that seem to M. Renan lovely and of good report.

Indeed the last words fairly enough describe the character of his general predilections. The affections of all kinds—though M. Renan has an odd craze that family affection is an “*égoïsme à plusieurs*” very liable to abuse—are the coefficients of human character with which he likes best to deal. In matter of natural beauty he inclines in the same way to the idyllic and pastoral. Even in such points as his views on education and science, the same solicitude for the presence of a human interest of the softer sort manifests itself. He is exceedingly anxious that France should devote herself more than has hitherto been the case to “*hautes études*.” But the *hautes études* which attract him are not mathematics or abstract philosophy, but comparative philology, critical history, the study of

religion, all of them more or less intimately connected with the hopes and fears, the daily life and daily wants of the endless generations behind us. Whatsoever is abstract, bloodless, and dry, repels him. Despite the *Lettre à M. Berthelot* and some other things, I should doubt whether he has much genuine affection for what is commonly called natural science. The touch of materialism and of inhumanity, which often accompanies the pursuit of such science, must necessarily revolt him.

Thus such force as M. Renan can exert is a force in the direction of spiritualism, morality of a certain kind, peaceable flows of soul. It may sometimes be difficult to square his apparent views and desires with any accurate estimate of the history of the past, or the probabilities of the future. The pleasant cloudy Utopias which he describes (in which great Pan seems to be alive again, and everybody contributes to the foundation and confirmation of the Kingdom of God by inoffensive conduct, freedom from uncomfortable striving and *πλεονεξία*, and the cultivation of comparative philology, and the domestic affections) seem occasionally to be situated in a land that is very far off. It has indeed been observed by the wisdom of the elders that the rainbow rarely touches the ground quite close to the spectator's feet, and that St Brandan's Isle, and other regions of the blest, have a knack of fleeing before the seeker.

Nevertheless it is impossible to assign any but a beneficial tendency to an influence of this kind at such a time as the present. M. Renan represents in French literature the tradition which his countryman Châteaubriand founded, or borrowed from Rousseau, nearly a century ago, and which was continued to our own days by George Sand—the tendency, that is to say, to rely

upon and appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect, to dress up amiable thoughts in gorgeous or elegant language, to philosophise, if possible, *ἀνευ μαλακίας*, and to cultivate the beautiful with such regard to *εὐτέλεια* as may be. His literary taste is much better than Châteaubriand's, though his imaginative power is considerably less; and he rarely lapses into the merely tawdry or the merely sentimental. His philosophy is a good deal saner and less windy than George Sand's (though, as we have seen, he too has a slight weakness for apocalypses), and he has a much more practical spirit than the Châtelaine of Nohant.

Neither of these his forerunners was a very distinguished practitioner of purely literary criticism, nor is M. Renan. His opinions on certain points are too definitely and obtrusively present with him for that, and he does not attain to the absolute catholicity which is the first requisite of the literary critic. It is doubtful whether in this direction he could even get as far as the paradox of Thackeray on Swift—"I suppose there is no person who reads but must admire...and I say that, great as he is, we should hoot him." The desire to hoot would get the better even of the preliminary admiration in M. Renan's case. But if his value as a critic of literature be unequal, it is still considerable. His remarks on the classical French literature of the seventeenth century are among the very best ever made by a Frenchman, being equally distant from the parrot-cry of admiration which is now raised more loudly than ever by the neo-classic school in France, and from the exaggerated depreciation of the *romantique à tous crins*. Yet his real value is not that of a critic of letters so much as that of a critic of life. In face of what, with a fine confusion of language, are sometimes called the positive and sometimes the

negative tendencies of the day, tendencies which in any case make for a certain hardness of moral texture, the presence of an authority of this kind, taking up his parable and preaching charity, mutual good-will, the admiration of harmless things, and the cultivation of blameless feelings, ought to be counted as on the whole a healthy influence. It is the business no doubt of the avowedly religious person to perform this same function, and to a great extent he does perform it, but in the case of those who do not agree with him he suffers from the reciprocal conjugation of the historical verb *je suis suspect, tu es suspect*, etc. The extremer political reformer is very much more occupied in furthering his views at any cost than in taking measures to prevent his own manners or anybody else's from becoming fierce. Ordinary politicians and ordinary men of business have something else to do, and are naturally inclined to look upon the function as by no means a practical one. The quaint sentence of surprised contempt, which M. Renan in his essay on Channing devotes to the temperance movement, points out excellently the gulf between the philanthropist of the professional kind and his own larger, if vaguer, philanthropy. To say anything about men of science is as dangerous in these days as it once was to say anything about bishops, but it may at least be hinted that the cultivation of the softer feelings has not hitherto received any very active assistance from them. Last of all comes the class of professed devotees of literature and art; among whom, after a manner, M. Renan himself must be classed. Their attitude towards his methods and aims is perhaps not less unfavourable than that of other classes. They have, as was hinted at the beginning, a natural horror of anything like "gush," and they have had so much trouble to keep their own

studies clear of the question of moral tendency and influence, that they are apt to look on that question with disfavour. Hence sentiment, as distinguished from passion on one side, business on another, and devotion on a third, has not recently had a good time of it in the world, being regarded by some as a mere counterfeit of something better; by others, as unpractical and womanish; by others, again, as leading to absurdities and slips of taste which should, above all things, be avoided. It is in the gap thus formed that M. Renan has with sufficient courage taken his stand. His gospel may certainly be said to be a vague gospel, and the enemy may contend that Morgane la Fée is architect and clerk of the works at the buildings which he so industriously edifies with graceful words and, at the same time, with a vast quantity of solid learning. But of his literary skill there can be no question, and scarcely less of the admirable character of his intentions.

The concluding volume of his great work is a fitting close to the whole, and moreover one of its most interesting parts. In Marcus Aurelius M. Renan found an example of one of those fortunate persons whom, as he himself said in a juvenile work many years ago, "*la tempête a laissés au milieu du grand océan pacifique, mer sans vagues et sans rivages, où l'on n'a d'autre étoile que la raison, ni d'autre boussole que son cœur.*" Marcus has not exactly produced this effect upon all his readers, but it is all the more interesting to see in what manner he produced the effect on M. Renan. This effect has given us a very satisfactory volume both from the literary and philosophical point of view. From the former M. Renan has enriched the world with a great deal of excellent work, free from the stiffness and aridity which too often characterise the work of learned

writers, possessed of a singular and somewhat feminine charm of suppleness, softness, and colour, but seldom deserving the unfavourable epithets of effeminacy, flaccidity, or tawdriness. From the latter he has supplied a distinct want in the thought of the time by advocating charity in the full Pauline sense against egotism, morality against mere æstheticism or mere intellectualism, attention to the spiritual as contrasted with the merely material interests of humanity. I happen (were this of the slightest importance) to differ from his views on a great majority of points, from the life of Christ to the advantages of living in common, and from Marcus Aurelius to Béranger. It has been all the greater pleasure to me to try and appreciate his literary character and position, in what I conceive to be the only spirit allowable for the critic.

The preceding pages were written in 1880, when M. Renan came to London to deliver the Hibbert Lectures for that year. They comprise a pretty complete survey of his literary work up to that date; and I think they may be without difficulty wrought into a still more complete estimate both of his work and of his life. The life, it is to be hoped, may be prolonged, but the character of the work is not likely to be much affected by any subsequent production, remarkable as is the produce which these ten years have yielded. The *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* have given a certain right to speak of the life of a man still living, a subject which, without such provocation, is in my judgment always better avoided; the work has been increased and its characteristics deepened and emphasised (not, I fear it must be said, always favourably) by the chief of the volumes published since the *Drames Philo-*

sophiques, the *Histoire d'Israël*, and the long post-dated *Avenir de la Science*.

Ernest Joseph Renan was born at Tréguier on the 27th of February 1823, and from very early days was destined to the priesthood. He has told us how, when a seminarist at Saint-Sulpice, he found himself dissatisfied with his proposed profession and the creed which it involved. Or rather he has *not* told us. No man ever tells that story with perfect sincerity; there go too many and too subtle influences to the making of it. Nor in a purely literary study of M. Renan is there any need to inquire into these influences. It is sufficient to say that his clerical studies determined him in that way of Semitic science in which he persevered when the original determining influence had ceased. I have been assured of his competence in it by undoubted authorities, who frankly confessed at the same time that they approved neither of his original instruction nor of his later method. For a time he divided his attention between Semitic and mediæval subjects, and his first notable book of a literary character was that on Averroes, above referred to; though it will be observed that here the two studies met. He became an official of the Bibliothèque Nationale, was favoured in divers ways by divers administrations, and in 1860 was sent to Syria on one of those "missions," which are so incomprehensible to the British and so convenient to the French man of letters. He was shortly afterwards made Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France.

But meanwhile there had appeared, as a consequence chiefly of his Syrian visit, the famous *Vie de Jésus*, which developed itself into the many-volumed *Origines du Christianisme*. The clamour raised against his appointment to a professorship was for a time successful, and M. Renan, as he must have anticipated, had to

bear much harsh language. His career, however, at least since 1870, has been one of genuine success, though he never was able to enter the Chamber, despite various attempts. Of late years he has taken up a peculiar attitude, of which the before-mentioned *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* were in a sort the manifesto—an attitude of benevolent condescension both to the faiths which he has left and to the unfaiths which in a manner have left him. This is not an easy attitude to maintain without slips of taste, and M. Renan has been sufficiently guilty of them; but it has been to some extent excused in his case by the unquestioned supremacy which time and his own merits have given him among French men of letters. There is at the moment [1892] no one who can write French of the best kind as M. Renan can write it; and it would not be altogether just to attribute this merely to the lapse of time, the death of rivals, and the disuse of good practice by the younger generation. A man who between sixty and seventy can produce such work as the books I have named, work in some respects revealing new faculties and in none showing any degeneration, as far as literature goes, of the old, is rare in any literary history.

We need not delay very long over *L'Avenir de la Science*, which could hardly have been published forty years after date (the original publication having been prevented by sage counsel of friends and the revolution of February) by any man who was less serenely conscious of his own value, or whose literary position was less sure. M. Renan has belittled the formal value of the book in his preface so ingeniously that there is nothing left to say of that. But in truth and in fact its substantial worth is very small except for biographical purposes; and even here a tolerably ex-

perienced student of human nature in general, and of M. Renan's nature in particular, could almost dispense with it. Take a young man of great intellectual ability, and still greater (though as yet undeveloped) literary faculty; suppose in him a wide course of reading and the mental excitement caused not merely by the abandonment of his faith of his childhood but by the presence everywhere of novel ideas, socialist and other; add the study of German models which inclined him to throw his random thoughts on things in general into a form of quasi-system; add yet again the industry necessary to write five hundred large pages of rather close print—and you have *L'Avenir de la Science*.

Very different are the two other works to which I have referred. The *Histoire d'Israël* is one of the most extraordinary books ever written. With no loss of literary power, it exaggerates the oddities in method of the *Origines* to a tenfold degree. One of the most diverting critical exercises known to me is that of the late M. Scherer on its first volume. M. Scherer was by no means an orthodox person; he had (later and after far more struggles) gone through the same process which M. Renan performed rather light-heartedly at Saint-Sulpice; he admired the style; he was not shocked at the conclusions. But as a serious critic he was very much shocked at the method. He grows almost plaintive over it. "Il fait usage," cries he, "du document condamné comme s'il ne l'avait pas condamné!" Elsewhere "il généralise des faits individuels, il érige des faits accidentels en usages constants." Elsewhere, again, "il lui arrive parfois d'insérer dans son récit un détail qui complète l'image et la situation sauf à nous déclarer en note qu'il n'en faut rien croire." Alas! it is but too true; it is even a great deal less than

the truth. Let any one turn to the first volume and examine the structure which M. Renan has built out of the single and doubtful word "Jacobel"; to the second, and digest the marvellous romance in which, by combining the Book of Kings with the forty-fifth Psalm, applying the terms of the latter to Áhab's bride, and adding any quantity of his own peculiar sentiment, he has succeeded in making a Jezebel who is a sort of compound of Mary Queen of Scots, Maria Theresa, Aspasia, Semiramis, and Cleopatra; to the third, and contemplate the picture of the last days of Jerusalem before the Babylonish conquest. If, knowing something of criticism and of logic, the reader be "serious," he will, like M. Scherer, be aghast. If he unite frivolity with the same knowledge, he will be in constant fits of laughter. Never was such iconoclasm joined to such castle-building on nothing,—such a determination not to accept documents as wholly true, mingled with such willingness to accept any part that can be made convenient, without the slightest evidence that it is more trustworthy than its context. The book sometimes reads like a designed caricature of the author's own methods in the earlier *Origines*, the methods of conjectural restoration which I have indicated. In face of this caricature it is perhaps a critical duty to speak more bluntly, and pronounce the whole thing delightful but preposterous. It is indeed no wonder that writers like M. Scherer should have looked gravely on it. For it is something worse than a caricature of M. Renan; it is a caricature, and a very damaging one, of the whole methods of biblical criticism. And it must have made not a few readers ask themselves whether other professors of that certainly not too modest science, though they may lack M. Renan's exuberance, his luxuriance, and his

literary skill, are not at bottom one with him in the habit of arbitrary selection and unfounded judgment.

These books, though they brought out and threw up some of the defects in M. Renan's literary character, showed him in no absolutely new light. The *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* and still more the *Drames Philosophiques* (the series of which had just been opened with *Caliban* when I wrote originally, and which were later completed by *L'Eau de Jouvence*, *Le Prêtre de Nemi* and *L'Abbesse de Jouarre*) did to a certain extent exhibit him in such a light, the effects of which were partly favourable and partly not. The *Drames* in particular may count among the most remarkable work that a man verging on his sixtieth year with the first of them, and long past it at the date of the last, ever produced. They had a great success—in the case of the last a success decidedly of scandal; and however mixed may be the feelings of admiration with which a pure taste may regard them, they are certainly clever (a word which I select advisedly) in the very highest degree. One part of their cleverness lies in the manifold and apparently indiscriminate satire which the author pours on things and persons, without ever running into the cut-and-dried. Democracy and aristocracy, the classes and the masses, religion and irreligion, worldliness and unworldliness, morality and immorality, all come in for this satire; and if there are not infrequent lapses of taste, there are few of brains. The most curious thing—not entirely unexpected perhaps by careful readers, but still curious—was the development of a sort of refined but rather ungentlemanly sensuality which M. Renan showed. There is no coarseness in any of these books. But in parts of *L'Eau du Jouvence*, in the treatment if not the *donnée* of *L'Abbesse de Jouarre*, and in some prefatory remarks to the *Souvenirs*

especially, there is a most singular Cyrenaicism. The *Royaume de Dieu* becomes a sort of Otaheite, and each shepherd, provided that he has previously taken all his degrees and is an enlightened person, is permitted, nay! encouraged, to clasp his yielding fair one in the sage's sight. The effect was not altogether delightful, owing to a sentiment of human nature which has been put magisterially by the bagman in *Pickwick*. "You all know, gentlemen, to hear an old fellow who ought to know better talking about these things is very unpleasant." M. Renan has even shocked some disciples and critics, not always old fogies, who cannot pretend to be at all straitlaced in their own principles and practice, and he certainly has exhibited the operations of the spirit in a manner suited not only to shock those who are sensitive, but to cause those of them who are critical and combative to blaspheme him with no small show of reason.

These later works, indeed, while even increasing one's respect for M. Renan's cleverness, for his wonderful command of French, and so forth, may serve to emphasise and fill in a judgment which, as the acute reader will have perceived, was adumbrated from the beginning of the foregoing essay. In some purely literary gifts M. Renan has had few superiors among the men of our time. Never sublime or manly, he can touch almost every chord within the range of the French language except the chords of manliness and sublimity. Pathos, gentle satire, pure narration, exposition which is half argument and half narrative, imaginative construction, supple and subtle interpretation; he can do them all, and do them goldenly. In three things, and three things only, does he go wrong—in his excess of egotism, in his defect of taste, which comes from a defect of reverence, and in the weakness

of his reasoning power, properly so called. It may be that egotism is a specially French quality, though it is fair to say that third parties do not seem to see much difference between French and English in this matter. But in M. Renan, whether as a matter of idiosyncrasy or a matter of nationality, it has reached its climax. The mere presence of the *je* and the *moi-même* (though perhaps he abuses even them when his subjects are considered) would go for nothing. But every sentence, though the *moi haïssable* may be leagues off in appearance, is saturated with self-consciousness. Even Byron is not M. Renan's superior or inferior in always thinking of himself whatsoever he is writing about. This of itself would argue a defect of taste; but the defect is shown in other ways which have been glanced at both in the earlier and in the later part of this essay. I have heard him accused of "greasiness," and I am afraid there is a good deal to be said for the charge. Whether it be due to the advanced age at which he became an erotic writer, or to some other cause, he is deficient in passion. The breaking of her vows by the Abbess de Jouarre, on the supposed eve of her execution, is not an impossible subject by any means, though it is a difficult one; it is made impossible, or at least offensive, simply by M. Renan's own manner of dealing with it.

Perhaps, however, all his defects may be set down to the weakness of his reasoning power, which for a professed philosopher is remarkable, and is scarcely less obvious than that of Victor Hugo. The paralogisms and question-beggings visible in the *Origines* and glaring in the *Histoire d'Israël* may be paralleled from every division of his work. And so the adversary may say, without too much injustice, of M. Renan that to the discussion of the most serious of subjects he brings

chiefly the faculties of a novelist, or rather those of a poet who should happen to be incapacitated for writing poetry and for feeling it in its noblest forms, and who can but write soft, warm, exquisitely coloured, exquisitely undulating and palpitating prose¹. [1892.]

¹ The publication, while this volume was passing through the press, of a new collection of M. Renan's miscellanies entitled *Feuilles Détachées*, necessitates no alteration in the above postscript. Indeed both the text and the preface (the latter partly apologetic) only illustrate further what is there said (1892). M. Renan died shortly after the volume itself appeared. I have thought it better to republish this exactly as it originally stood when first republished, though fresh material has in the interval and recently accrued (1924).

VII

A PARADOX ON QUINET¹ [1883]

ON the 14th of May 1883 there was unveiled, at Bourgen-Bresse, the statue of a French man of letters less known, perhaps, to English readers than any of his contemporaries of equal rank. It cannot be said that most of those who have endeavoured to make Edgar Quinet known to us have gone a very probable way to do it. Not very many years ago, a Professor of Modern History in one of the English Universities is said to have confessed, with much frankness, that he had never heard of him. Since that he found a very sympathetic essayist in the late Professor Dowden and a still more enthusiastic biographer in Mr Richard Heath. But Professor Dowden, in an essay of much literary merit, began by assuring us that Quinet was first and chiefly part of the conscience of France. Those (and they were probably numerous) to whom this phrase conveyed next to no meaning might well think that Quinet, a somewhat mystical person himself, had found a more mystical expositor. Mr Heath, whose book is a very useful biography as far as it goes (though, with characteristic oddity, it stops dead in the very middle of Quinet's life), has pitched it in an equally high key, even where its actual language is not composed of enigmas or conundrums. Treatment of this kind rather discourages a modest critic, who on the one hand feels that he cannot pretend to speak in

¹ It is perhaps as well to warn the reader of this reprint that, for years before and after the date of this review, French politics were nearly as much my business as French literature, and that I have never lost sight of them (1924).

the language of the *seen*, and who, on the other, is convinced that Quinet is worth expounding to a generation rather unlikely to study him for itself. He is a decidedly voluminous writer, and as some parts of the nominally complete edition of his works have, in accordance with a bad habit of French publishers, been re-issued with somewhat altered contents, it requires some vigilance on the part of the book-buyer or his book-seller to make certain that the volumes are really complete, and do not present any exasperating combination of gaps and duplicates. It so happens, too, that Quinet was a man of very varied sympathies, and in order to comprehend them it is almost necessary that the student should, at some time or other in his life, have taken an interest in divers sets and bundles of ideas. He was a theologian, a politician, a philosophical student, a literary critic, a poet, a historian, all in one, and sometimes all at once, and it requires a good deal of attention to decide in which character he is speaking at a given moment. But for this very reason he is a very instructive study for a generation which, however much it specialises in the departments of thought which arrogate to themselves the name of science, mixes up its theology, its politics, its history, its poetry, and its philosophy, in a kind of general hotch-potch. I once ventured to say elsewhere that Quinet, like his friend Michelet, exhibits specially the defects of a period of journalism, and it follows almost naturally from this that he is a useful study for those who live in a period of journalism. But he is more than this. The constant mixture of motives and inclinations in him, and the effect which his political, philosophical, and religious views exercised on the quality and character of his literary productions, make him a singularly favourable subject for critical analysis of that

effect and mixture. Such criticism is neither the least interesting nor the least valuable department of the critic's work.

There are few writers the character of whose work has been more moulded by external circumstances than was the case with Quinet. He had an idiosyncrasy certainly, but its development was influenced to a far more than ordinary extent by his parents, his place of abode, his friends, his lot in life. His father, Jérôme Quinet, was an ex-commissary of the Republican army, a Bonaparte-hater, a man of science, a martinet, and something of a cynic. His mother, whom he adored as it is the amiable fashion of Frenchmen to adore their mothers, was nominally a Protestant in religion, but really a kind of undogmatic Christian, with a strong emotional religiosity, directed into the vague, an admiration for Racine, and another admiration for Voltaire. His place of abode in his youth was in one of the most out-of-the-way districts of France, the heathy country near Bourg-en-Bresse, where he was born, a country of hills, sequestered pools, malaria, silence and solitude. Quinet grew up in an odd fashion. The name of the reigning emperor (Edgar was born in 1803) was for years never pronounced in the house, and the natural result, when the boy did come to hear of it, was a fit of suppressed Bonaparte-worship, which, perhaps, was never wholly cured. He was afraid of his father; he was taught by his mother to pray fervently to no one in particular, and to act scenes of Racine with her. In these circumstances he became a rather precocious and decidedly old-fashioned child. He was by no means unmanly; on the contrary, when the invasion came, he formed a kind of corps of boy volunteers; but neither his amusements nor his ways were those of the average boy, even the average French

boy. He believed himself to be desperately in love when he was about thirteen, as, indeed, many other boys have believed themselves to be, but hardly in his high-flying fashion. When he came to go regularly to school, first at Bourg and then at Lyons, he was anything but happy, though his work, after a little time, gave him no trouble. At Lyons there was a grand barring-out in which his school-fellow, Jules Janin, took an active part. But Quinet wrote to his mother with portentous good sense, that "he had inquired into the reason of the revolt, the leaders had not been able to answer him, and after that, would she believe him fool enough to compromise his new happiness?" His principal amusement was playing the violin.

In 1820 Edgar Quinet was seventeen, full of books, full of dreams, not quite cured of his devotion to the beautiful Pulcheria, and more than ever given to writing long letters of almost rhapsodical affection to his mother. His masters at Lyons, finding that there was absolutely no mischief in him, had, after the first few months, allowed him almost entirely to take his own way. He was thus very ill disposed towards his father's wish that he should enter the *École Polytechnique* to prepare for the army. He resisted vigorously, and M. Quinet, less tyrannical than many fathers whose characters have been described as more amiable, gave way, and consented that he should go into a banker's office. This did not please him much better. As a preparation for Paris and the desk, he went home, and resumed for months his wanderings and broodings among the heaths of the Ain. It is not to be wondered that he found the banker's office even more distasteful than he had anticipated. He held out for a short time, and then resigned his situation and went into open revolt and a garret. For a time his

allowance was withheld, and he was in considerable straits; but there never seems to have been a complete rupture of relations with his family. During two years he did little but read and write, though he made some desultory and rather half-hearted attempts to study law, and went to a certain extent into society. His first book, the *Tablettes du Juif Errant*, appeared at his own expense at the end of 1821. He made pedestrian tours in various places; and though he was still nominally at issue with his father, the worst thing that happened to him seems to have been an occasional penitential residence at home, where he wandered, dreamed, and read as usual.

At last his opportunity came to him; he met with an English translation of Herder's *Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, and resolved to translate it himself into French, though he had to learn German first in order to do so. He did his task rapidly, and he had what must be called the remarkable luck of finding a publisher who gave him a hundred pounds for it, and paid part in advance. Out of this Quinet indulged himself in a trip to England in the spring of 1825. His good luck continued. The book introduced him to Cousin, who was already an influential, and was not, as he was later, a rather jealous patron; and at Cousin's house he met his *dimidium animæ*, Michelet. He wrote paper after paper; he made trips into Germany, studied there, fell in love there. He was always falling in love in an amiable and virtuous manner. At length, in 1829, he received an appointment on a French commission to Greece, where he gained credit, gathered the materials of a book, and enjoyed himself immensely in his own fashion. Indeed, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Quinet was an exceptionally lucky man. Save for the one short and not very severe period

of trial in Paris, everything fell out as he wished it. The home authorities grumbled, but did not proceed to extremities. When he began to live by literature, it was by the kind of literature that he liked and chose. He had none of the drudgery—journalism, or school-mastering, or even inferior official work—which the great majority of men of letters who are not born to fortune experience, and from which many of them never escape. He was always able to work as he liked, on what subject he liked, and as long as he liked. *Fortunati nimium* are such.

After the Greek mission, however, his luck turned a little. The Revolution of 1830 seemed promising; but Louis Philippe and Guizot did not want visionary Republicans, and Cousin was developing his constitutional jealousy. For a time Quinet was put off with fair words, but he was now completely familiar with the Paris literary circle, and he formed many projects and did some good work. His admirers have absurdly exaggerated the supposed discovery of Old French poetry that he made at this time. It did him, no doubt, great credit that he appreciated its merits; but the name of the late M. Paulin Paris, to mention no other, is enough to show how absolutely unnecessary it was for Quinet to “discover” the *Chansons de Gestes*. For two or three years he employed himself in this miscellaneous manner, and in 1831 the death of his father must have made it still more easy for him to follow his own devices. In 1833 he visited Italy; then he published *Abasuerus*; then he married Minna Moré, the German girl with whom he had fallen in love years before. His marriage gave him much happiness, and may be said to have settled him in many ways. He planned and wrote *Napoléon* and *Prometheus*, went much into society, wrote a good deal in the *Revue des*

Deux Mondes, and generally became something of a personage; but it was not till 1839, when he was six-and-thirty, that a settled place was found for him by his nomination (still, it is said, rather against Louis Philippe's will) to a professorship at Lyons. In about three years he was moved by Villemain to a chair at the Collège de France, but in the meantime he had delivered the courses which he afterwards shaped into the *Génie des Religions*.

There is no doubt that in a certain sense Quinet had found his vocation in the professoriate. He could, on occasion, both argue and state cases with accuracy, precision, and vigour in writing; but he was, on the whole, of "imagination too diffuse" (to borrow Mr Gladstone's well-known and rather felicitous blunder) to be a great philosopher or a great historian. He had not the organs of expression, necessary to the poet, in any perfection or even in any considerable degree; but he had the oratorical power, the fertile fancy, the enthusiasm, the command of colour, which tell in lectures on any but purely scientific subjects. He was, accordingly, a very effective lecturer even at Lyons. When in 1841 he was transferred to the Collège de France, a special chair "*des littératures Méridionales*" was created in his favour. According to a system which he was one of the earliest to carry out thoroughly, he took much pains to qualify himself for his task by local and miscellaneous exploration. But unluckily he conceived it his duty to enter into a crusade against the Jesuits and Ultramontanism, being probably stimulated thereto (for *cherchez la femme* or *cherchez l'homme* is a constant caution necessary in Quinet's life and works) by Michelet. The two, with some assistance from the Polish poet Mickiewicz, succeeded in making the lecture-rooms of the Collège de France complete

bear-gardens, the clericals and the anti-clericals assembling in equal force to groan or to applaud. Ministerial and professorial expostulations as to the extraordinary latitude which Quinet was giving himself were in vain; and at last, when he definitely announced a course on "Les Institutions de l'Europe Méridionale" (the reader may be requested to imagine the Taylorian professor at Oxford announcing a course on the Inquisition), the authorities had no choice, in the interests of education as well as of order, but to stop so manifest an abuse.

Quinet was bitterly mortified, but time soon brought him his revenge. The Revolution of February saw him, musket on shoulder, at the gate of the Tuileries; and this manifestation was rewarded by the colonelcy of the 11th Legion, by the restoration of his professorship, and by a seat in the Parliament of the New Republic. Here Quinet made no ill figure. If his politics were unpractical, they were generous and not too subversive of things existing; while, unlike some future comrades in exile even more illustrious in literature than himself, he from the first divined and distrusted Napoleon III. Exile could not but follow the *coup d'état* in his case, and he established himself at Brussels. His first wife had died shortly before, and he married again. His second wife was a Roumanian lady, the daughter of a local poet named Assaki, and the marriage had hardly less influence on him than Michelet's similar union. The seven years of his Brussels sojourn were not unfruitful, producing *Les Esclaves*, an edition (with an interesting memoir) of *Marnix de Sainte-Aldegonde*, a book on Roumanian independence, and other things. But when in 1858, owing partly to political reasons, he moved to Switzerland and established himself at Vevy-taux, on Lake Lemman, the situation proved even more

favourable. The country was stimulating to his genius; and before the fall of the Empire he had written *Merlin l'Enchanteur*, a vast prose dramatic epic (if such a heap of contradictions may be allowed); his history of the campaign of 1815; *La Révolution*, his largest, and in substance if not in style his most important single work; *La Création*, a semi-literary, semi-scientific production on about the same scale as *Merlin*; and a great many pamphlets on current events. The downfall of his enemy at once brought him back to Paris, where he spent the time of the siege, frequently exhorting his fellow-countrymen in eloquent harangues on paper. He survived the conclusion of peace four years, dying on the 27th of March 1875. He had been once more restored to his professorship, and was active with his pen till the last, his chief production being *L'Esprit Nouveau*, published a year before his death.

The work thus produced in more than fifty years of literary life is in many ways some of the most curious work to be anywhere found. No competent critic can read Quinet without perceiving that his literary powers are almost, if not altogether, of the first class. No unprejudiced critic can read Quinet without acknowledging not only that no single performance of his is of the first class, but that it is to the last degree puzzling to what single work to refer a reader who is anxious to verify the flattering opinion of his powers just asserted. The *Tablettes du Juif Errant* is a clever trifle. The *Génie des Religions* has no doubt considerable merit as an early example of eloquent and ingenious generalisation; but for fully half a century the secret of its composition has been such an open secret that it can hardly be said, except for the purely literary merit of its detached passages, to be a very remarkable book. All have got the seed of it now, and one tutor

at Oxford or Cambridge must have a difficulty in meeting another without smiling as they think of the patient undergraduate noting *vues d'ensemble*, which he is perfectly competent, with a very little audacity to take for himself. The lectures against Jesuitry and Ultramontanism are fair one-sided polemics, but the whole volume has not a tithe of the force and fire which dwell in Carlyle's single Latter-day Pamphlet. *Les Révolutions d'Italie* has much attraction. Some exquisite passages, an agreeable spirit of sympathy, and poetic appreciation, appear in it; but it is vitiated throughout by the fundamental historical delusion, that there ever was before 1859 a political entity called Italy—before entertaining which delusion such a student as Quinet must have had to make believe very much indeed. The polemic against Strauss is indeed in parts extraordinarily vigorous; but here the writer is taking as it were a campaign with the Teutonic knights against the heathen, quite independent of his usual military service and allegiance. *Marnix de Sainte-Aldegonde* shows all Quinet's generous sympathy with liberty; but it is injured by the wilful shutting of its author's eyes to the fact that his hero was by no means a saint, and still more by his extraordinary want of humour. Whenever Quinet attempts humour he is simply terrible; Victor Hugo himself is a Swift to him. His description of the young German visiting France in his *Allemagne et Italie*, and his pretended critique of his own *Vacances en Espagne*, are among the most deplorable attempts to be funny of which any man of genius has been guilty since Landor at least. In the *Marnix* he is not directly humorous; but a reader, to whom the gods have given some slight appreciation of what humour is, can hardly fail to resent his comparison of Sainte-Aldegonde's dismal ribaldry with the

immortal work of Rabelais from which it is imitated. The Roumanian book is of very little value. The poems, verse and prose, narrative and dramatic, literary and scientific, political and autobiographic, are, by the confession of Quinet's warmest admirers, at least as full of faults as of beauties. In verse, the author's imperfect command of poetical expression, of rhythm, of language, of suitable imagery, constantly makes itself felt. In prose, notwithstanding the almost inevitable passages of beauty—sometimes of exquisite beauty—the obscurity of the plan, the defect of central object and interest, do the greatest harm to the general effect. The letters and the earlier *Histoire de mes Idées* are charming, but not of a kind to found a reputation upon, though they contain the *pièces* for discovering Quinet's weakness. *The Campaign of 1815* is a careful and in parts effective though rather one-sided narrative, but it is nothing more. Most of the pamphlets are merely occasional, and hardly any are very forcible. *La Révolution* is a work of singular equity, originality, and (in part) merit; but its apologetic preface, of which more presently, is a key to all the contradictions of the author, and those contradictions assert themselves too vividly in the book itself to make it a masterpiece. The books written after the war show marks of age, and to a certain extent an undue crystallisation of ideas. All through the six-and-twenty volumes the reader wanders seeking a masterpiece, a representative and complete work, and he finds none. Yet when he comes to the end of them he has no doubt that, both as a man of letters, and (though with very extraordinary limitations) as a thinker, Quinet had not many superiors in his own time.

If, however, no result came of the reading of six-and-twenty volumes except the conviction of this

paradox, the said reading would hardly be a justifiable employment for any one not condemned to penal servitude for life. For, owing to Quinet's inequality, he is not even invariably certain to give the reader pleasure, though a volume of beauties, if not two or three volumes, might be selected from him which would not be inferior in literary attraction to anything else of the kind existing. Such passages as that on the eternity of art in the *Génie des Religions*, and the wonderful description of the cathedral in *Ahasuerus*, cannot be too highly praised or too much enjoyed. But nobody who reads for anything besides mere amusement—indeed, nobody who finds amusement in getting the utmost edification he can out of his reading—can fail to ask himself the reason of this singular inequality and incompleteness. The solution is not very long in being found. It suggests itself even after reading the account of Quinet's early life; it suggests itself perhaps most strongly on comparing his works with those of Michelet, his sworn brother. No one can doubt that Michelet was a Democrat by the whole complexion and direction of his temperament. He is not merely intellectually convinced of Democratic theory: he is full of fervent love and admiration for Democratic practice. His tastes, his prejudices, his very imagination all have the Democratic colour. With what vigour of conviction, as well as of colouring, does he endeavour to make out the misery and the vileness of feudal times all the while that he is dwelling on them! How thoroughly is he convinced of the depravity of kings, ministers, aristocrats, and such-like folk! He is not intentionally unfair to them (he is never intentionally unfair), but it is quite evident that though his humanity would probably prevent him from personally carrying out that most ingenious plan for the joint and com-

bined extinction of the last king and the last priest, he would be intellectually sure that it was a most auspicious event. This undoubting conviction, this child-like faith or unfaith, lights up the whole enormous mass of Michelet's work. All his purposes and thoughts are harmonious; no idea gets, consciously or unconsciously, in the way of another idea, and hinders it from reaching its goal.

With Quinet it is altogether different. He thinks himself, and has for the most part been thought by others, to be a sincere—indeed, an ardent Democrat. He is always talking about “le peuple”; about its virtues, its conscience (that luckless word!), its destinies, its superiority to everybody else; for, like other theorists of the same kidney, Quinet seems to imagine an abstract “peuple” which is not noble, nor *bourgeois*, nor peasant, nor artisan, nor all of these things in general, but simply *not* any of them in particular. He always takes the Democratic side; but when we come to examine his work, it is surprising how little of the root of the Democratic matter there is in him. He appears to be a Democrat, as far as one can make him out, partly from his early education, and partly from what may best be called a series of dislikes. He disliked the fossil legitimism of the Restoration, the splendid injustice of despotism, the mean and arbitrary constitutionalism-up-to-a-certain-point of the July monarchy; but in England, at least, he might have disliked all these things, and yet have been a vigorous anti-Democrat. In France there was no such opening for him. So he took up Democracy, or grew up into it, and swallowed, as far as he could, the principles of '89, and glorified “le peuple,” and talked elegant mysticism about the regeneration of humanity.

He had been taught early that Voltaire was the

cleverest of men, and, as I have said, had imbibed from his mother a kind of undogmatic Protestantism. This, for a person so susceptible to early impressions as he was, made Catholicism impossible; not to mention that the two chief schools of it—the rigid, half-logical, half-legal school of Joseph de Maistre, and the rococo-picturesque school of Châteaubriand—were ill-suited to him. So he entered into a polemic against Catholicism, reserving, however, a heavy fire for Strauss and for all who attempted to deny the importance of Christianity. He somewhere textually implores France to “come out of the Middle Ages,” as Thackeray’s Bishop of Ealing implored his flock to “come out of Rome.” Yet he is himself always going back into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seem to have had, in comparison, little or no attraction for him. In dealing with mediæval subjects, he keeps up his Democratic polemic nominally, but his handling is entirely different from Michelet’s hearty attitude of horror. He lingers over the period, dwells fondly on its literature, its art, its popular fancies and forms. He borrows these latter for his own original work; he shows by innumerable touches that, but for his horror of Catholicism, he might almost have adopted the standpoint of Ozanam, certainly that of Montalembert.

These and many other peculiarities breed a perpetual contradiction in him. In one place, for instance, he speaks enthusiastically of De Wette as “the greatest of critics”; in another, he puts forcibly and unanswerably that sound and conservative argument, which makes all the labours of all the De Wettes in the world idle: “*Réglez, changez, à votre gré la chronologie des monuments hébraïques: vous ne pourrez nier qu’un même génie ne règne dans tous, et c’est ce génie*

qui est à lui seul toute la difficulté." The contrast might be repeated indefinitely in other material. It reaches its height in the *Révolution*: and the critique which he himself prefixed to that book is the most convenient exhibition of it. There is an air of mild surprise about the tone of this paper which is eminently characteristic, and transparently genuine. "On m'a répondu," says Quinet, "comme on faisait il y a soixante et dix ans à Pitt et Cobourg." "What on earth," the reader who is more impatient than inquisitive may exclaim, "did he expect them to answer?" The rejoinder to this is, that Democracy, in Quinet's acceptation of the word, is something that never was, is not, and, it may without rashness be asserted, never will be on land or sea. He is, perhaps, the most distinguished, and certainly the most amiable, of the respectable visionaries who, postulating that Democracy shall have all the virtues which have been historically observed in its opposites, and none of the vices which have been historically inseparable from itself, reproachfully ask us afterwards how we can resist their demonstrations of the admirable results to be expected from a Democracy of their fashion. All through his works, and especially in the later of them, the contrast between the sense which Quinet attaches to words, and the sense that the practical politicians of the party to which he apparently belongs attach to them, is alternately ludicrous and bewildering. Shortly before his death he defined marriage as "la communauté des choses divines et humaines." How admirably this expresses the sentiments of the French Republican party whose general political views the treatise in which these words occur was written to propagate and defend! If there is one principle which is inseparable from Democracy, it is the paramount authority of universal

suffrage. Without that, Democracy becomes utterly chaotic, hopelessly invertebrate; its own principles fail to justify it or help it in the slightest degree. What, then, does Quinet say about universal suffrage? "En quoi," cries he indignantly, just as the highest of English Tories might cry, "en quoi ce vote de millions d'hommes pourrait-il me lier?" Certainly I have no intention of arguing this point across the Styx with Quinet, or fighting it out when we meet. But it may be permitted to ask, in return, "What becomes of Democracy if this noble protest of the individual is to be permitted?"

The state of confusion and contradiction into which Quinet sometimes comes in his later works is positively pitiable. In the latest of all he has to deal with the question of the decline of population in France. The cause, he says, is obvious to any one who opens his eyes. This cause, which we have only got to open our eyes to see is—what? It is that "Le Catholicisme Ultramontain est aujourd'hui une religion de dépopulation." This was published gravely in 1874 by a man whose knowledge of modern history was far beyond the common, and whose general intelligence was still farther beyond it. The advance of France in Catholicism during the last century is a fact so undoubted, the working of the Code Napoléon has in each generation been accompanied by such a recrudescence of faith, that there is no more to be said. These examples might be multiplied indefinitely; indeed, it is impossible to take up a single book of Quinet's without finding them. Thus, in one place, he argues very learnedly, with the help of De Candolle and Captain Galton, to prove that the characteristics of aristocracy and race cannot possibly be found in modern persons of title, because of the constant influx of plebeian blood. Drop *L'Esprit*

Nouveau and take up *La République*, books published at a very short interval, and you will find him arguing that these very signs of race are to be found, and chiefly found, in the plebs itself. If this be so, how in the name of wonder can intermixture with the plebs destroy them?

A survey, then, of this curious character and his remarkable work authorises, I think, some conclusions of a practical kind. Quinet, as we have seen, handled a very large number of subjects, and found himself in opposition to, and by consequence in alliance with, remarkably different parties and persons. We see him taking the positive side in religion as against Strauss, the negative as against the orthodox Churches; defending an advanced democracy in his lectures and his books, while manifesting throughout all his imaginative and most of his critical work an ardent sympathy with periods, institutions, and ideas with which monarchy and aristocracy are indissolubly connected, and which draw most of their charm and interest from their appeal to monarchic and aristocratic sentiment. It is unnecessary to trace further the origin of this contradiction. It may have been due to his early education, or to a genuine idiosyncrasy, or merely to conflict between the spirit of the age and a temperament and taste too weak to assert themselves fully and undividedly. That is a minor point of psychological biography and does not matter much. But what is obvious is that the conservative, and even what would be called by some people the reactionary, elements in Quinet were the source of his strength, while the destructive and revolutionary elements were the source of his weakness. It is chiefly to his having constantly felt in Conservatism while he strove to think in Radicalism, that his failure to achieve a higher position than he

actually holds in literature is due. Quinet's strongest faculty was no doubt his faculty of poetic appreciation, though it was unfortunately not accompanied by any adequate faculty of poetic expression. In exercising it he tries to cheat its natural bent, by selecting Prometheus and Ahasuerus for heroes. But the effort is entirely vain. When religious, monarchic, and aristocratic ideas present themselves, his imagination kindles at once; when ideas of the contrary sort are to be dealt with, it sinks and flags. Nor is this inclination a matter of sentiment merely. No controversial passage in his work has half the force of the Strauss refutation. Even in the *Révolution*, when he had become as it were a Democrat by profession, the strongest passages are anti-Democratic, as is shown by the lukewarm admiration of Republicans for the book.

But it would not be wholly fair to say that he had mistaken his vocation, or had been turned aside from it by early associations and teaching. In justice we must rather say that there was no vocation for him in his own country and time. He is perhaps even a stronger instance than Montalembert, inasmuch as his intellectual and literary powers were greater by far than those of the author of *Les Moines d'Occident*, of the incalculable harm and loss which the lack of a Tory party properly so called, that is to say, of a party not clerical first of all, nor Legitimist first of all, but generally Conservative in Church and State, has inflicted on France. There was, it is hardly necessary to say, no such a party in France when Quinet was young; there never was any such at any time of his life. There was no more disastrous result of the Revolutionary cataclysm, and perhaps it should be said in fairness also of the *gran rifiuto* of the emigration which made that cataclysm complete, than the doing away with the

possibility of such a party. It is true that the abuses of the last century of the Monarchy had in any case made such a party almost impossible, though to the last germs of one existed in the Parliaments and the other provincial institutions. But the Republic and the Code Napoléon between them made a clean sweep, and the result has been seen in the procession of "transient and embarrassed phantoms" of constitutions, dynasties, institutions, and policies which has traversed the stage of French politics ever since.

When he came of age, intellectually speaking, a Frenchman of Quinet's date had to choose between parties almost equally uninviting: and later Frenchmen have been rather worse than better off. The purely Legitimist party in France has never been able to conciliate imaginative temperaments: it could not even keep what it had got in the case of Victor Hugo: it has oscillated drearily for more than half a century between discreditable compromise, more discreditable intrigue, a blank, stupid, sluggish *non possumus* and, more recently, a sort of rowdyism. Clericalism *quand même* naturally had and has no attraction for a patriot. The modified Clericalism of such men as Montalembert on the one side, and Lacordaire on the other, had much of the same drawback as Clericalism pure and simple, and, moreover, was so entirely arbitrary and unsettled a creed—lacking even the semblance of a general principle—that it could not satisfy a man whose *ethos* was like Quinet's, after all, philosophical. Bonapartism requires either a personal faith, which Quinet, though he tried hard to embrace it, could not manage, or a disregard of all but purely selfish and material considerations, which revolted him. The meanness, the lack of poetry, the hide-bound doctrinairism of the Orleanists could not but disgust him. There was

nothing left but some variety of Republicanism, which looked as none of the others did, unselfish; which had, as none of the others except Legitimism had, some historical connection with the glories of a rather recent past; which, never having been really tried in quiet times, could not be said to have failed; and which afforded special opportunity for the eloquent grandiosities irresistible to almost all Frenchmen of genius. Republicanism, too, had in his case the support of early education, and, perhaps, the unsuspected help of some private and half-conscious grudges against the existing régimes. It seemed to imply the giving up of dogma and ecclesiasticism if not of Christianity, and this sacrifice also was made easy to Quinet by early training. So he tried to "rin oot sarkless on the public," but, like other people in the same condition, he was all his life fumbling to cover his nakedness with fragments of the rejected sark.

Of a party of French Toryism—not in the sense in which he himself once or twice uses the word, but in the proper sense of a party resisting useless change, cherishing national tradition, impatient of equality and its natural result, the tyranny of the individual who has fifty equals agreeing with him over the individual who has only forty-eight—Quinet would have been a very suitable member. His theistic and romantic sympathies, his love of antiquity and the picturesque, would have found easy satisfaction in it, and he would not have been tormented by the impossible attempt to prove abstract political theories with which those sympathies were perpetually clashing. He found himself, by the operation of the irony of fate, in exactly the opposite ranks to those which such a party would have marshalled, and throughout his life he exhibited the effects of the incongruity. He might have been a

Châteaubriand with more logic and more honesty, a Joseph de Maistre with more imagination, a humaner sympathy, and a wider range of thought. As it is, he is a kind of curiosity, useless, or nearly so, to his own party, a study of contradictions to some, and an unmixed joy only to a few well-intentioned discoverers of mares'-nests, and a larger number of admirers of vague and amiable grandiloquence.

VIII

THE CONTRASTS OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE¹ [1892]

To compass the extent, so as to exhibit the contrasts, of two such literatures as those of England and France in the space of sixty minutes, may seem, no doubt, rather a hazardous attempt. It would be hazardous indeed if it pretended to be complete in that period; still more if it pretended to dispense hearers or readers from the study necessary to verify the contrasts for themselves. I think, however, and I have on one or two other occasions endeavoured to maintain, that the study of literature, almost more than any other study, gains in being, and indeed needs to be, carried on by the method of contrast and comparison. I am quite sure that the enjoyment of that study, as well as the edification of it, is enormously increased by the comparative method. We have it on great authority that time and chance happen to us all; and it is no doubt partly due to accident that for a great many years a considerable share of my own daily work has lain in the critical consideration of the two literatures now before us, mixed and blended in a rather unusual manner. But I think I may assert that there has been some choice as well as some accident and necessity in it; and I am more and more convinced of the advantages of the mixture. On this point I may have something more to say presently: and I have only referred to it

¹ The substance of this essay was first delivered as a lecture before the Bradford Philosophical Society on Feb. 16, 1891; and then appeared as an article, with a few alterations and omissions, in *Macmillan's Magazine* for the next month. It is now reprinted in a state closer to its first form but not quite identical therewith (1892).

in the opening of this discourse as a kind of apology for handling a subject which, at the first stating of it, may seem to argue a little presumption in the handler.

I should like, however, to explain at the outset what sort of contrast and what sort of comparison I wish to invite you to make. I have known the senses of the words curiously confused and misinterpreted by persons whom I should hardly have supposed likely to be guilty of such confusion. Our comparison here will not be in the least ungracious. What I do not want to do myself, or to induce any one else to do, is to exalt either literature at the expense of the other—to run down English for the sake of showing that they order these things better in France, or to point out the defects of French in order to show how great a nation we ourselves are in literature as in other things. I do not want any one—I most distinctly decline myself—to “like” French better than English, or English better than French. They have an agreeable by-word in Scotland when a Scotchman wants to make himself agreeable to the Southron. “I should like,” he says, “to be a Scotchman and to have an Englishman for my friend.” I have heard various conjectural explanations, some of them malicious, of this compliment, but for my own part I have always been contented to accept it in good faith. And in the same way, and by adaptation not parody of it, I would say in reference to our present subject that I should like to be a countryman of Shakespeare and Swift and Scott and Shelley, and to be able to carry on that friendship of reading which is not the least delightful and much the safest kind of friendship with the countrymen of Rabelais and Molière and Voltaire and Hugo. If I can in these few minutes do anything to introduce others to this pleasant society by pointing out the contrasts

which are supposed to be better provokers of friendship than any mere agreements and similarities, I shall be very well satisfied myself; and I am sure that I shall have deserved some gratitude from those to whom I have thus acted as master of the ceremonies.

In making the comparison it will, I think, be well to keep as much as possible to the historical side of the matter. By this I mean that it will be well to avoid certain kinds of contrast and certain kinds of comparison which have been occasionally resorted to, and which have sometimes led to obscurity rather than enlightenment. All my hearers are no doubt acquainted with certain famous passages which the late Mr Matthew Arnold—a critic never to be mentioned without respect by critics, a writer never to be thought of without admiration by writers—devoted to what seemed to him mistaken moral tendencies and unpleasant moral features of French character and French literature. We shall not concern ourselves much here with discussing whether a certain goddess with a not very pretty name is or is not the special object of French devotion, whether Frenchmen have or have not been too prone to prefer the irregular Ishmael to the blameless Isaac. Some recent passages in the history of their literature might tend to strengthen the affirmative answer; but from the wider historical point of view we should have to let the negative also have full play. We should have to show that at some times England has been a conspicuously and grievously worse sinner than France in this respect; and that at others or the same France has not justly deserved the imputation of the sin at all. We should have to note, for instance, two great times and two great divisions of her literature. The immense body of romantic adventure-stories of the Middle Ages is, if not rigorously strict in ethical

theory, extraordinarily free from coarseness of thought or language; while the whole official literature of France during the *grand siècle* is almost uniformly decorous at a time when great part of English literature was conspicuously the reverse. But such a matter as this need not occupy us very long, more especially as the historic view shows it to be accidental not essential, temporary not permanent.

I may disappoint some tastes more by declining to pursue another line of comparison which is now very popular, and which is indeed sometimes, it would seem, thought to be imperative. Some of you may expect me to show how the contrasted characteristics of French and English respectively are due, on the race and heredity theories, to the Celtic, Teutonic, and Latin strains mingled in them, to various Teutonic strains with a slight admixture of Celtic and others in us. I have, I hope, a sufficient stock of orthodoxy in some ways; but I own that in others, and this is one of them, I am profoundly heretical. In the first place these fashionable explanations of the *omne scibile* vary and yet recur in a manner most disquieting, I should think, to the believer (save that he can rarely be got to consider it); most amusing, I am sure, to the sceptic. Although I am not a very aged man I am old enough to remember the later heyday of another universal explainer, the association-of-ideas theory¹. When I was an undergraduate at Oxford professorial and tutorial chairs were still mostly held by disciples of Mr Mill; and we explained (except some of us whom the gods made critical even then) everything by association. Mr Mill died in the metaphorical as well as in the physical sense; Mr Darwin succeeded him, and now the

¹ And now that I am pretty "aged" I see yet another—Evolution—going the same way (1924).

scientific explanation of all things is by selection and heredity, evolution and crossing. I think it excessively likely that many of my hearers, and not absolutely impossible that I myself, may live to see this in its turn succeeded by something else as popular, as satisfactory, as passing. These dominant keys to the mystery of the universe are in the truest sense

Priests that slew the slayer and shall themselves be slain.

They always tell some truth, and the truths they tell are always made to extend far too widely and to apply far too absolutely. Moreover, there is one thing specially questionable about them to a cool-headed observer. They can be made at pleasure to explain anything, to turn round (at least, for opening is another matter) in any lock. You find, for instance, a Frenchman who displays somewhat un-French characteristics, and you discover that he had an English mother or grandmother. Clearly the mother or grandmother explains. But when you find an Englishman who, though he had a French mother or grandmother, shows no French tendencies, are you puzzled? Not in the very least. You decide at once that the admixture of French blood has not been strong enough to divert or influence the plain English stream. If you find a man who displays the accepted characteristics of his race in an intense degree, this of course is an effectual proof that they *are* the characteristics of the race, and is highly gratifying. But it is scarcely less gratifying to find one in whom prevail characteristics widely different from, or even diametrically opposed to, those assumed as "racial." The atavist explanation will give you a delightful hunt; and even if this should prove fruitless, the well-known doctrine of repulsion or reaction from the *milieu* will demolish

the difficulty triumphantly. In other words, a man with a tolerably fertile imagination and a little trick of logic (it will do no harm if he be specially expert in the department of fallacies) can adjust the theory—and all such theories—to any circumstances, and can perform to a miracle that kind of explanation of the problem which consists in restating it in other words. And I think that if he were as frank as Captain Dugald Dalgetty, he would take very much the captain's attitude towards all theories of the kind. He, you remember, after a pleasant summary of the party cries of his day added, "Good watchwords all—excellent watchwords! Whilk is the best I cannot say; but sure I am that I have fought knee-deep in blood many a day for one that was ten degrees worse than the worst of them all." Substitute skull-deep in argument, and you have it.

Let us therefore not attempt this side of the matter; and, however tempting they may be, let us decline both deductions from general race theories and paradoxes from individual contradictions of them. It is a curious thing, no doubt, that what is by some accounts the highest poetry of the world, and is by general consent among the highest, comes from a race which is also by general consent one of the most prosaic, the most matter-of-fact, the most, as some would say, Philistine of races. It is curious again that the Frenchman who prides himself upon being *né malin*, upon his lightness and adjustability of wit, should be of all created beings not only the most disinclined to new ideas on many points, but the most positively incapable of entertaining them. A friend of mine¹ who, if he had paid less attention to the literature of France than I have, had lived in France much more and knew French-

¹ The late Mr Egerton Castle (1924).

men in the flesh much better than myself, many years ago observed to me, "A Frenchman's mind is built in water-tight compartments, and when the bolts are once shot nothing can get in." These things, and other things like them, are interesting no doubt; but the consideration of them would only draw us away from our proper subject, and seduce us into pleasing but delusive generalisations of the kind to which I have referred already. Let us abstain from such Delilahs of the imagination, and come down to comparison of the actual course of the two literatures. Let us see, as far as we can in the time, what they have done, what they present between the covers of their million books, what we can actually conclude as to their agreements and differences, not on any *a priori* theories, but from simple induction based on the observed and arranged facts of the two histories.

In considering the first and not the least striking point of contrast between the two there is something—not much—which may offer a little initial difficulty. If I say, what I believe to be an undoubted fact, that the course of French literature is much longer and more unbroken than that of English, I am likely to be confronted with some indignant gainsayers who will accuse me of treason to Old English. Some of these, a hardy folk, would assert an apostolical succession of English from *Beowulf* (though nobody knows when *Beowulf* was written) to the very latest work of Lord Tennyson. Professor Earle, who has written a most interesting book on English prose, assures us that it was in full force in the tenth century; and I am not sure that he does not hold the English prose of the tenth century to be something which we are only laboriously endeavouring to equal now. Certainly French cannot pretend to any antiquity like this. But

then what they call Old English, that is to say, everything before the thirteenth century or thereabouts, is of such a nature that no one who merely knows modern English can read it except by guesswork¹. The earliest literary French that we have dates probably from the end of the eleventh century: and though I know that both in France and England there are those who deny it, I do not believe that any fairly intelligent man or woman who can read a French book of to-day will have much real difficulty in reading the *Chanson de Roland*. The difficulty that he or she will have will be about the same which used to be felt in England before we became more familiar, and so not more contemptuous, but more at our ease with Chaucer.

Now the best criterion of a literature's identity is the being readable in all parts by intelligent and fairly educated persons without special study or great difficulty. Taking it as a starting-point we shall find that what I said just now about French and English is very fairly true; we shall find likewise that not only is the appearance of French as a literary language earlier, but its development is much more varied, regular, and equal. There is nothing at all surprising in this, nor need it grieve the self-love of any Englishman. Although French had undergone its process of transformation from Latin through the *Lingua Romana* with extraordinary rapidity and thoroughness—with thoroughness and rapidity for which I think there is elsewhere no parallel—it had always, so to speak, its ancestor at the back of it. In the four or five centuries during which the process of transformation lasted, all the

¹ This was an exaggeration, though the contrast still holds. When I was appointed to the Chair of English Literature in Edinburgh I did not feel comfortable without knowing the whole of it from the literary, if not the philological point of view. And I found this side of the Pisgah by no means difficult to attain (1924).

educated part of the nation had the old literary language in more or less use, and some at least of its monuments in contemplation. The French, in short, in those days, whatever they have done in later ones, steadily "dwelt in the old house while the new was a-building," and it was impossible that the results of this should not make themselves felt.

We, on the other hand, started with a great if undeveloped literary faculty—as Gothic and Icelandic and Old High-German, the kindred and ancestral tongues, show—but with no ancestry of written literature, and with the apparatus of the only literary tongue that to the knowledge of our ancestors existed, utterly unfitted for our use. We had to make all new apparatus for ourselves: the French found it to a great extent made for them. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the marks of this difference are on the two languages and the two literatures to this day. There is undoubtedly an Old English prosody and an Old English syntax, but both, and especially the former, are rudimentary compared to what is shown by the first finished, which is also all but the first piece of organised, French. I do not think it at all fanciful or rash to trace to this difference the main divergence, too striking and manifold to have escaped any observer between the two—the divergence between order in the French and license in the English. Whether order was Heaven's first law I do not know; but it certainly was the first law of the Latins. It would be out of our way to do more than allude to the examples of this to be found in their politics, their economy, their religion, their jurisprudence: but equally valid proofs of it are to be found in their literature. In no single case did they borrow (as they were always borrowing) from the Greeks without drawing the reins tighter, discarding

license, substituting a hard and fast rule for a discretionary alternative. Some of the results of this were, no doubt, lost in the centuries of disintegration: but enough remained to make French, when it emerged from those centuries, an almost scholastic language compared with English, and to impress on it a character which it has never lost. Only in these latter days have Frenchmen—greatly daring, and then under the censure of their authorities—ventured to break through such rules as that of the fixed *cæsura* at certain parts of a line which we find in the earliest monuments of the literature, and that of the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes which meets us almost as early. They have never to this day, except in mere unliterary song-writing, and in some recent and fantastic experiments, ventured to slur a syllable, or to neglect that mute *e* the value of which in French itself some Englishmen of great accomplishment seem not even to suspect. And the interesting thing is that there is absolutely no period during the eight centuries of the existence of French as a literary language in which these characteristics do not appear. If the formative laws of French verse, and in a less degree of French prose, are not exactly the laws of the Medes and Persians which alter not, they deserve that description more thoroughly than the laws of any other literature of equal duration known to me. French constantly experienced foreign influences, indeed during the Middle Ages it may be said to have been to no small extent both inspired and written by foreigners. It went to school to Italian in the sixteenth century, to Spanish in the seventeenth, to English in the eighteenth. But so strongly fixed was it in the forms and moulds into which it was first run that it never experienced a sensible alteration of form. From time to time attempts

not suited to the genius of the language were made, and they died still-born. Even now [1892], when the liberty of the Romantic movement has long diverged into all sorts of queer excesses, the spell is in full force, and neither M. Richepin nor M. Verlaine, nor even M. Moréas, can help reminding us constantly of the restrictions which as a Frenchman or a writer of French he underlies.

Contrast this for one moment with our own literary history. So far has it been from being the case that the laws and forms of English have resisted foreign influences in a similar way, that almost the only restrictions which we have ever obeyed, and those but partially, have been of foreign importation; and that we have thrown our own matter into them instead of subjecting their matter to our own form or absence of form. Even the sonnet's ribs of steel we made pliable, and in more complicated matters, such as the Classical tragedy, we refused again and again to bear the yoke because we could not shape it to our necks. It is, or used to be, the fashion to hold that during the "correct" period—the period of the influence of Dryden and still more of Pope—English did become in a manner formal; but the slightest examination will show to how small an extent this was the case. For the moment the stream ran small and low, and so it did not attempt to overpass the bounds which were set it; but with the first freshet they were all swept utterly away, and became as though they had never been. Just as France, constantly feeling foreign influences, has never expressed those influences in anything but a more or less French form, so England has constantly borrowed foreign forms, has bent and lissomed them after her own manner, and has uttered through them her own spirit—the curious, indefinable,

incalculable spirit, which some short-sighted people call insular, but which is in effect and at its best microcosmic, possessing something in common with all parts of the world of mind, though as a whole more different from any of them than they are from each other.

It is, however, particularly desirable to avoid rash language in connection with this matter of form: and I should like to bring our contrast before you a little more particularly under that special light. I have, to bring out the comparison in another way, just adopted the ordinary description of the lawlessness of English as contrasted with the strict formality of French. It is the truth, but not all the truth. In the sense in which French is subject to the reign of law, English is no doubt comparatively lawless, but in that sense only. I think that some, and even some great ones, have made a grievous mistake by sighing in this sense for change from lawlessness to law. When I hear these sighs I always think of a certain delightful verse of Peacock's:

But this you may know, that as long as they grow,
Whatever change may be,
You never can teach either oak or beech
To be aught but a greenwood tree.

And English is one with its own greenwood trees in this respect. It will grow as it likes or not at all; and if you try the *ars topiaria* upon it you will only make stunted abortions or playthings at the best, pretty enough, but obviously out of their kind and element. When a certain French poet undertook to teach poetry in twenty (or was it thirty?) lessons he was not in reality uttering either a paradox or a bravado. Not only can a very great deal of what makes poetry in French be taught in lessons (the precise number does not matter), but what is much more important, the

greatest poet in the world could not write good French poetry without such lessons given orally or by reading. No amount of genius will teach a man, except by pure accident, to break his twelve-syllabled lines at the sixth, and his ten-syllabled ones at the fourth syllable; to tip alternate, and only alternate, pairs of rhymes with *e* and so forth. Of such rules, of such form as this there is practically nothing in English verse or prose, both of which justify themselves by the effect, or not at all.

In the same way, English is much more tolerant than French—if French can be said to be tolerant, and if English can be said to be intolerant—of peculiarities and neologisms of phrase. I know that there is just now a school of Frenchmen who are trying to break the intolerance down in France; and I know that there not only is, but always has been, a school of Englishmen who strongly object to the tolerance in England. I can only say that, as usual, I look at history and judge by it *securus*. All the greatest Frenchmen, with a very few exceptions, have been on the side of rigour; all the greatest Englishmen, with a very few exceptions, have been on the side of latitude. If I were a Frenchman, I should be the fiercest of purists; as I am an Englishman, I choose to follow with unequal steps the seven-leagued strides of Shakespeare and Dryden and the rest, in taking a new word or a new construction, whenever it seems to me that the word or the construction is not intrinsically objectionable, that it is defensible by English analogy, and that it either supplies an actual want or furnishes a useful or ornamental alternative. But because I am thus for liberty in English, do I maintain that English has no forms of its own—that it is simply a case of “go as you please”? Most assuredly not. English is probably, if

not certainly, a more difficult language to write really well than French; and it could not possibly be that if it were a mere "pidgin" dialect, composition in which were limited to the hanging together anyhow of a sufficient number of words to express the thought. It has its own forms, and very severe ones they are in their own way. But they are in some cases not easy, in others impossible, to formulate in the ordinary way and sense. They are something like those ancient laws of various peoples which were never written down, and which it was a sort of sacrilege to write down. They are transmitted by observance of the elders, by inference and calculation, sometimes as it were almost by an inherited and otherwise incommunicable instinct. A great Greek philosopher has been sometimes laughed at, and sometimes made a text to preach the weakness of philosophy, because he added to a definition, "and as the intelligent man would define it." That addition is essential to all our English laws and forms of literature. Where the Frenchman has a clear positive enactment which is to take or to leave, the Englishman finds only a caution "as the intelligent man shall decide," or "unless the intelligent man shall decide otherwise."

It has always seemed to me that consideration of these points ought specially to affect the discussion of a question which is constantly being renewed in England (whether with entire seriousness or not it is difficult to say), the question whether a French Academy adjusted to the meridian of Greenwich would be a good thing for us. That question has been revived lately with increasing frequency, and it is particularly well suited to certain characteristics of public life to-day. On one side of the matter, the personal side, I need say nothing here. I have no doubt at all that we could

get together a very respectable, not to say a brilliant Forty in England, and I have less than no doubt that some, at least, of those who were not included would be exceedingly angry at their exclusion. These things are incidental to Academies even in the countries where they exist. But an incident is not an essential. What I do not see is the good that the Academy is to do in England when it is got together¹. The good that it is to do, and to some extent does, in France is quite clear. The "Forty Geese that guard the capitol" (it is only fair to remember that that excellent jest was made by a goose who had failed of appointment as a guard) know exactly what they are appointed to do. They have to maintain the hard and fast rules to which we have already referred, to exemplify them in their own writing, to denounce the breach of them in others. Further, as even the hardest and fastest rules must sometimes admit of enlargement after a fashion, they have from time to time to signify certain relaxations and easements—not of the strictest form of French, for that is irrelaxable, but of what may be called the attitude of French official criticism—by admitting some innovator of undoubted genius or prevailing popularity to the charmed circle. They do this part of their duty a little less well than the other, but they do it fairly; and they do the other very well indeed. For you will observe that it is a duty which can be done by men not exactly of genius, almost as well as by men of genius, and perhaps even better. In the worst times, by the least distinguished of Immortals, provided only that the individual members are fairly educated and

¹ Zola looking up *Who's Who* in his manner may say, "Hullo! and they call you F.B.A.?" I need perhaps only repeat once more Benedict's immortal excuse. But as a matter of fact the British Academy now in existence hardly resembles the French at all, though it may have some resemblance to the Institute (1924).

not in their rashest youth, the form-traditions of French, which are so clear and so valuable, can be observed and championed. In the best times, the very best writers can but exemplify them with additions, can but show how the greatest talent or even genius may put up with them and yet suffer no loss. The advantage of this is obvious: it is not metaphor, but simple expression of fact, to say that a French Academician is in the position of a French judge. He has a clear code to expound and apply; and he can hardly be so abnormally stupid or so abnormally clever as not to be able to do this. The danger is that the code should lapse for want of exposition and application. And that is what he exists to prevent, and what his mere existence, such as he must almost necessarily be, does prevent of itself.

But how different is our state! I do not myself see how an English Academy could do any good, how it could even refrain from doing considerable harm, unless its members were, in positive and permanent majority, men of genius endowed with consummate judgment in the first place and with almost superhuman catholicity in the second. For we have no fixed rules to apply. We cannot take down a code and turn to article so and so, clause so much, with a certainty of finding that it meets the case in hand. Unless we could always count on a standing majority of men of genius, tempered in each case by judgment and sympathy, we should have mere stupidity dominant at one time, mere crotchet at another, mere exaggeration at a third. So far from having a fixed central exponent of the literary standard we should have ups and downs considerably worse than at present. We should not only neglect but crucify our Chattertons and our James Thomsons at one time: at another we

should endow them all, Chattertons and others, for fear of accidents, at the public expense, to the intolerable annoyance of future generations. Now to maintain a standing majority of men of genius—of genius doubled with judgment and doubled again with catholicity—on such a board is, I should imagine, a very dangerous attempt indeed. Allowing for illness and accident, we must keep at least thirty such out of the forty. Are we prepared always to do so? Could any country that literary history tells us of have done so? Remember, they must be men who have produced and can produce masterpieces in their own kind, or they will not be respected. They must be able also to recognise masterpieces and promises of masterpieces in kinds the most different from their own. They must have at once the qualities of the Chief Justice and those of Falstaff. They must be academic and Bohemian, creative and critical, full of intense individuality, and full of catholic appreciation. I have a very high idea of the powers of my countrymen, but I think we might try them too high in setting them such a task. It has not been invariably achieved to admiration even in France, where the conditions of themselves facilitate success. Is it worth while trying it here, where they are such as almost to assure failure?

If we turn to another point of the contrast—a point which has been more than once mentioned—the contrast of spirit, we shall find ourselves on somewhat more perilous ground. The contrasts of outward form may be misinterpreted, but cannot be wholly missed. Yet as the poet says—

Soul is form and doth the body make.

And to the soul we must go. It is far harder and far more apparently presumptuous to attempt to sum up

the spirit of a literature in a few words and minutes than in a few words to define its outwardly formal characteristics. It is especially hard in the case not of French but of English. Yet those whose minds have been long in contact with the two literatures are here even less than elsewhere likely to come to any serious disagreement about them. There are five pairs of opposites, or at least of differences, in the two which I think would be acknowledged by most such persons.

The first is the *sobriety* of French, as opposed to that characteristic of English which presents itself to foreigners in the light which suggests to them the famous phrase "mad Englishman." The second, closely allied, is the predominant *wit* of French literature as opposed to the predominant humour of English. The third is the singular abundance of what may be called mechanical *inventiveness* in French balanced by the discursive imagination of the English. The fourth is the *clearness* and *precision* which seem to be wedded to the genius of the French language¹ as opposed to our own proneness to the vague and obscure. The fifth is the prevalence of the *critical spirit* in French as opposed to a certain impatience of criticism proper which is extremely noticeable in English. Pray do not let these divisions of mine mislead anybody. I am not saying that all Frenchmen are witty, that all Englishmen are humorous (I wish to heaven they were!); that no Englishmen are witty, which would be conspicuously false, or that no Frenchmen are humorous, which would be, though very generally, by no means universally true. In the same way, no one of the other qualities mentioned is either universally present in the literature of the one nation, or universally absent in the literature of the other. But the division holds on the average

¹ As Rivarol said, *vide sup.* p. 76.

of the two cases. And what holds still more strongly is that combination of these and other qualities which is present in the highest examples of each. Thus the French have never produced any man with that combination of sense of the vague, of imagination, and of humour which goes to make the very highest poetry; and I am not sure that we have ever produced any one with that mixture of sobriety, inventiveness, precision, wit, and critical spirit which goes to make the most technically accomplished prose. The difference is the same at the other end of the scale. It is almost impossible for a Frenchman to write such bad prose as an Englishman writes easily and with joy; and though there is a strange characteristic about very bad poetry which makes all nations of the earth akin, I am not quite sure that an Englishman can write it quite so badly, with a badness so little relieved by mere absurdity, so little dependent upon technical faults, so sheerly, purely, hopelessly *bad*, as that which comes naturally to some Frenchmen. For the mere sound of English is poetical, while that of French (third parties, the only judges, will tell us this) is not; and so the English poetaster may blunder into a success, as the wandering and unconscious wind draws music from a harp. In French that is not to be done; and with the absence of art there is the absence of everything.

Yet another set of differences arises almost necessarily from the combination of the results of these two; but they are not on that account less interesting. Although all languages more or less attempt, and attempt with more or less success, different kinds, still most of them, especially when they have such strong idiosyncrasies as the pair we are now surveying, devote themselves with peculiar success to this kind or to that. Of poetry proper we need say little, for what has been just said

accounts for and disposes of it with fair completeness: but in prose and drama the case is different. With respect to drama I am not a very good judge, taking myself little pleasure in the theatre, and knowing little about it except that it incidentally produces some excellent and much execrable literature. I suppose we may not borrow from Marmontel his famous apology that the English succeed better in poetry than the French because their genius is more poetical. But I never could see myself why the countrymen of Shakespeare and Congreve and Sheridan should have to borrow plays even from the countrymen of Molière. Probably, however, that mechanical and orderly inventiveness of which we have spoken is at the bottom of it.

In prose it is much plainer sailing. We should almost be prepared to find from the considerations already advanced, and we do find as a matter of fact, that Englishmen excel in all the departments which border on poetry, while the French excel us in oratory, in a certain kind of history, and, generally speaking, in the exposition of clearly understood facts and theories. The superiority of literary hackwork in France is a commonplace, a truism, almost (I am myself inclined to think) what some ingenious person called a *falsism*. I have never been able to admit that the usual newspaper article in France, for instance, is better than with us, though it no doubt has a certain superficial air of superior order, logic (which is often desperately illogical), and general arrangement. But what in years of constant miscellaneous reading of books fresh from the press of both countries I have found, is the immense and extraordinary superiority of French as a medium for what itself calls vulgarisation—for what we call popularisation—of scientific and miscellaneous

facts. Happy is the man—I do not say who wants to go deeply into a subject, but who wants to find a clear and not exactly superficial exposition of it, and who can find that exposition ready to his hand in French.

Another universally recognised advantage is that which French has in the more properly literary department of aphorism, maxim-writing, and the like. The successful construction of such things in English is one of the hardest and one of the rarest exercises of our tongue; it is, if not one of the commonest and easiest, comparatively common and easy in French. And it throws a most curious and instructive side-light on those contrasts which we are discussing, that the writers who in English strive to make themselves remarkable by epigrams, *pensées*, aphorisms, and the like, are almost invariably driven to do it by manufacturing what may be called hard sayings. They feel the necessity of what some one has naïvely called “raising language [the language of Shakespeare and Shelley!] to a higher power.” They make the natural vagueness of the language vaguer, they push to license its liberty of using words in new senses, they go more and more to the ends of the earth for strangely-matched metaphors and unexpectedly-adjusted images. The French maxim-maker, by an obvious instinct, does just the reverse. He clarifies yet further the natural clearness of his speech, avoids with yet more scrupulous care the juxtaposition of apparently incongruous images. The most wonderful of all examples of compressed thought which has yet perfect urbanity and lucidity of expression are the immortal maxims of La Rochefoucauld. He, with the other great writers of the same class who have followed him, has provided as it were so many different ready-made moulds of the *pensée* and maxim, that lesser men and women can run

their own very inferior matter into these, and turn out something which at least looks like a *pensée* or a maxim with ease. Hardly a year passes without there coming, fresh from the Paris press, some book of the kind, generally very prettily printed, often quite prettily written, and, if you read it without too much attention, reading not unlike the real thing. On the other hand, it is almost impossible even to translate such things into English at their best; and as for original writing of them, Englishmen, to do them justice, very rarely attempt it. When they do, it is still more rare that they achieve anything but rubbish pure and simple, or rubbish tricked and spangled up with strange tinsel of language. I am by no means sure that this is wholly or even to any considerable extent a proof of weakness in our language, though the opposite of it is certainly connected with the strength of French. These aphorisms and epigrams are almost always half-truths at most. The flash of them dazzles in the very act of illuminating, and I half think that the tendency to produce and to be satisfied by them accounts to some extent for, and is in turn to some extent accounted for by, that limitation and obtuseness of the acute and enterprising French mind which has been already glanced at. An epigram or an aphorism, like a dilemma, is in perpetual danger of what is technically called retorsion—a fact of which the person who delights overmuch in it is but too likely to take insufficient heed.

Whether there is much to choose between the languages in the matter of narrative is a long question to enter upon. There is, at any rate, very little doubt that we taught the French to write novels on more than one occasion. But instead of handling at any length the contrast of the English and the French novel,

which might well afford a more than sufficient subject for treatment by itself, let us take it as part of a wider division of this sketch—the contrasts presented by the two languages as subjects respectively of study and of amusement. It is sometimes objected to French that it is, for a study, too easy; and I certainly should never myself dream of recommending it as a substitute for studies still severer in form, more prolific in initial difficulties, and presenting a more elaborate and yet simpler because preciser discipline. In plainer language, I would never consent to accept the study of French in lieu of the study of Greek and Latin. But is any study, using that word in its proper sense, easy? I have tried many: I have found plenty of difficulty in all if only it be not deliberately avoided or carelessly ignored. The peculiar difficulty of French, even to some extent as a language but to a much greater extent as a literature, lies in the very fact that it looks so easy: that it looks so like English. There is an old joke about the surprise of the untravelled Englishman who lands at Calais and discovers that the people, despite their strange facility in speaking French, are very nearly human. I am inclined to think that the real danger is the other way. Only after a very considerable study of French life and French literature does one discover the deep and almost unfathomable differences which exist between them and the life and literature of England. We pride ourselves from time to time on the thought that Europe is getting more and more cosmopolitan, that nations are getting to understand each other better, and so forth. Are they? I doubt it very much. In ordinary experience, on the surface of politics, manners, letters, there may seem to be no great separation, but the cracks are like those very unpleasant natural fissures which widen as they

go down. In many matters it is simply impossible to get a Frenchman even to understand the English point of view; and not much easier, though I think it is a little easier, to get the Englishman to understand the French.

Now the finding out, if not the reconciling, of such differences, is one of the chief businesses and one of the chief benefits of the combined study of the two literatures. It is really a much more effectual way than that of residence in the two countries. For in the first place, it is very hard for a foreigner in either to get really what is now called "in touch" with the national life; and by as much as he does get in touch with it, by so much, infallibly and by the law of nature, does he get out of touch with his own people. In that silent companionship of the library which has been extolled by writers far too great for any wise man to attempt to rival their phrase, this difficulty disappears. La Bruyère does not put you out of touch with Addison, Swift with Voltaire, Corneille with Shakespeare, Balzac with Thackeray, Tennyson with Hugo. You do not become less an Englishman because you are familiar with French from the *Chanson de Roland* to the works of "Gyp," or less of a Frenchman because you are, as at least one¹ French friend of mine is, and as I wish more Frenchmen were, familiar with English from Chaucer to Browning. You may not care—you might not be able if you did care—to exchange in either case your point of view for the other; but you are no longer unconscious of the two points; you can trace them in the past, you can to a great extent foresee them in given cases in the future, and above all you can understand them. There

¹ I referred then to the late M. Beljame. But his place I am happy to say has been taken by M. Émile Legouis: and the diffusion of the sense of English literature which M. Beljame himself did more than any one else to start is steadily widening (1924).

are few things in the world better than understanding, though there are many more common.

Perhaps, however, enjoyment is not less good even than understanding, and here too the contrast of the two literatures heightens the benefit of them. There is, I believe, a notion, prevalent, though not quite so prevalent as it used to be, that there is something insincere, unnatural, impossible almost, in a liking for opposites and for things different from each other. I have never been able to share this notion myself, or to know why I may not admire *A*, because I admire *B*. On the contrary I should say that the admiration and enjoyment of *A* decidedly heighten the enjoyment and admiration of *B* by supplying perpetual foils, by bringing out in turn the excellences of each, and by softening the defects of each as it becomes clear that there are defects in the other. And it would be hardly possible to select, in the intellectual world, two subjects which perform this office of mutual correction and setting off so well as English and French literature perform it by dint of all the differences which we have been examining and many more. If there had really been a pre-established harmony in virtue of which each should supply what the other wants, each should correct the other's faults, each should serve as a whet to revive the appetite jaded by the other, the thing could not have been better arranged. The two together form the veritable Cleopatra of literary love-making, whom no age can wither nor custom stale. I do not forget the charms of others, or the merit of others; I would not give up my reading of Greek or of Latin for any consideration; I would not be ignorant of German, or unable to make a shift to read Dante; I wish I knew more than I do of other languages still. But I cannot help thinking that for those whose circumstances do

not permit them a wider range, it is absolutely impossible to find two literatures which, both for edification and delight, complete each other in so strange and perfect a way as these two.

If we have any intellectual advantage over the French (and being an exceedingly patriotic Englishman, I should be sorry to think we have not), it lies to no small extent in the fact that knowledge of French literature is far commoner in England than knowledge of English literature is in France. To be well read in French is no great distinction here; to be well read in English, whether it be regarded or not as a distinction in France, is an uncommonly rare accomplishment there¹. Many of my hearers must know and rejoice in the cleverest and most amusing of living² French critics, M. Jules Lemaître. Now it is M. Lemaître's pride and pleasure to assert his ignorance of English; and though it is never quite safe to take such declarations too seriously, I must say that his remarks on English literature bear testimony to his absolute veracity. After which M. Lemaître permits himself to express unfavourable opinions about Shakespeare. There is nothing surprising in that. But what, if not surprising is really interesting, is that this flaw in M. Lemaître's equipment shows itself just as much in his remarks on his own literature, as in his remarks on ours. He is not alive to things in French, and he misconceives things to which he is alive, exactly in the way from which knowledge of English would, or might, have saved him. And so doubtless would it be with any English critic who presumed to be ignorant of French; he would make mistakes in reference to English itself, from which knowledge of French would have saved him. But English critics are not so brave as

¹ See last note, p. 244.

² Then, not now.

French; and I hardly know one who would confess such ignorance even if he dared to run the risk of it.

Still we are not all critics, though, at the risk of seeing my own business overstocked or simply abolished, I am not sure that we ought not to be. At any rate we are all persons who have to live our lives, and who need take no shame in endeavouring to live them with as great and as varied an amount of honest and wholesome enjoyment as possible. And to that end, which I venture to think not in the very least a low or contemptible end considered from the point of view of any rational religion, philosophy, or æsthetic, I know no such adequate means on the intellectual side as the study of literature. It is not indeed at all times of life sufficient by itself, and I do not propose that it should be thought so. But it is, I believe, very rarely found to be successfully cultivated unless the cultivation begins pretty early and is pretty methodical. It does not interfere with the pursuit of other kinds of business, of pleasure, of duty—I rather doubt whether it is ever itself pursued with thorough success unless those who pursue it pursue the others too. But it has the great virtue of receiving us, if not into everlasting, yet into lasting habitations when the others fail. *Quelle triste vieillesse vous vous préparez!* said the great diplomatist and humorist who, as far as we can make out, made his last stroke of humour in leaving *Memoirs* more or less uninteresting, with tantalising precautions. He said it, as all know, to the person who was ignorant of whist. Far be it from me to speak of whist in any uncomplimentary fashion. But to play it satisfactorily you must get three other people, and those not the first comers; you must secure a place where whist is playable, and you must, at least that is my experience, make something of a business of it, and invest no small capital

of time, if not of money. You need do none of these things with literature. Books are cheap, and even those who cannot afford them can borrow them from libraries, though I own that for my part I cannot read with comfort any book that is not at least temporarily my own. They are infinite; they are unexacting; they can be taken up and put down at pleasure; they need no partner to secure their enjoyment; they interfere with nothing; they help everything. I would by no means oppose what some great ones have said about the excellence of desultory reading. But there is a certain charm also in filling out, not too methodically or slavishly, but with a sense of a definite end perhaps never to be reached but always to be aimed at, a certain scheme of reading. And that charm is, as it seems to me, infinitely increased by shaping the scheme so that it may include contrast and provide relief. For my part I have been and hope (*Nemesis* not interfering) to be a great reader, and I certainly would not limit myself to one or two literatures only. But what I should like to do before I die is to know as nearly as possible everything that is worth knowing in the two literatures of which we have been talking this evening. It is a large but not an impossible task, and I find as I go on with it that it is made not only vastly more interesting but also much easier by keeping one's eye, during the process, on the characteristics of the literatures as wholes; by endeavouring to see how each new book that one reads, be it of the twelfth century or the nineteenth, be it literature of power or literature of knowledge, confirms or modifies the general conclusions as to each which former reading has produced. It is quite possible that there may be some special attraction to a man, whose main ordinary business is political and miscellaneous journalism, in this kind of

subsidiary study, which at once carries one out of and corrects the merely ephemeral passages of the day. But I can see no reason why the comparative anatomy of the two literatures which I have found so satisfactory myself should not be equally satisfactory to others: and I can at least recommend it as one who has tried¹.

¹ I have adjusted one or two points in this essay which the lapse of thirty years has affected. But, as I have more than once said, I think the value of such reprints as this consists, if it exists, rather in the recording of the original view than in compromise. And the *core* of it, I think, holds. Even the late war and its sequels have rather exposed in a new way than composed or compromised the existence of the eternal and unbridgeable Channel (1924).

IX

THE END OF A CHAPTER [1895]

THE phrase *fin de siècle* has been for some time past so tediously hackneyed and so foolishly abused that there is some danger of forgetting the odd and considerable historical justification for it. Why so many things, political, literary, social, and miscellaneous, should observe the ends of such arbitrary periods as centuries nobody can say; and those good people who, when they cannot render the reason, feel constrained to deny the fact, may cavil at it if they like. But it certainly *is* a fact—subject of course, like other facts, to exceptions and variations, to less and to more.

One instance of it at the present time exceeds all others in definition and incontestableness; indeed I do not know that it would be possible to find a fellow to it, except in the same subject and the same country as near as may be a hundred years ago. This is the fact (recognised in a way by some, as by M. Lanson in his newly published *History*, but not fully stated by him for obvious reasons), that the literature of the nineteenth century in France has come to an end, that “Finis” has been written to at least this chapter of a long and brilliant history—that there is not even the postscript of transitional names and performances, which is occasionally present, to carry over matters till the new chapter discovers itself. Where till ten years ago the greatest name of the period in French literature was still at its head in poetry; where till within the present decade M. Renan still wrote such French prose as no one else did, and such prose as few

others had written during the last quarter of the century; where until the other day M. Taine abode as an example, if not of the most exquisite style or the most original creation, at any rate of varied literary craftsmanship and strenuous labour in criticism, in philosophy, in history, which exalted him very near to the first rank,—there is now, in the first rank, nobody at all¹. The last distinctly eminent poet of the second generation, of the generation rather of Renan than of Hugo, died with Leconte de Lisle; and though some admirable writers of the same order and date in prose, the best of whom is notably M. Jules Simon, survive, their formal excellence is not accompanied either by supremacy of form, as in Renan, or by vigour and weight of matter, as in Taine. Those who are left are no doubt very respectable people, with divers gifts and graces, to which we may return shortly. But it is impossible for any one who has acquired the perhaps not very common or easy gift of looking at things without distortion of view, through prejudice in favour of the old or of the new, to admit that they enable French literature to hold up its head as it has been able to hold it up, at any time since the third decade of the century. The chapter that began in the later twenties has closed in the earlier nineties, after as nearly as possible the exact threescore years and ten; and France is left very much as she was after the death of Diderot, rather earlier in the corresponding case of the last age, without a single first-class name in her current book-lists.

What a chapter it has been! We could match it ourselves, no doubt, and beat it easily; for our own

¹ Here, as indeed throughout this essay, I must specially request readers to notice the *date* of it. If anybody cries "But Anatole France" let him look further in the essay itself and still further in that devoted to M. France less than two years ago (1924).

corresponding age began before the same century, though only just before, has never failed since, and even now (though, according to some, our state be a little staggering and parlous) has not completely come to a close. We can match it again, and beat it again, with the great age from 1580 to 1660, in length, in sustainment, in intensity; while France herself has a fair second string in the later part of the same period. But with the doubtful exception of the rather short German "Augustan age" between the rise of Goethe and the death of Heine, no other European history of literature has anything to compare with it since the very beginning of the seventeenth century.

I do not know whether "to be young" in the French 1830 was "very heaven,"—the affirmation of the celestial quality would be a little troubled by the remembrance that it implies being dead or decrepit now. But what young Frenchman at any other time had not merely such an atmosphere of intoxication around him, but such a future of solid and lasting literary satisfaction as had the youth of that and the neighbouring years? In the literature of *mil-huit-cent-trente* itself there were no doubt many faults, to which it is quite a mistake to think that those who even yet fondly cherish its memory are blind. Though it could boast of the greatest of all critics, it was profoundly, defiantly, refreshingly uncritical, both of itself and of everybody else. It did, indeed, make a shift to distinguish between Scribe and Hugo; but it was a very long time before it could make up its mind between Janin and Sainte-Beuve, Sue and Balzac, Méry and Mérimée, Gozlan and Gautier. Although all young and strong literary periods are very noisy and rather absurd, this outstripped all of them in noise, if not in absurdity. Its perfectly healthy appetite for novelty, freshness,

foreign importations, liberty, variety, music, was pampered into a mere *boulimia* for anything out of the way and contrary to precedent. Those were the days (to eschew the more hackneyed examples) of Balzac's *Wann-Chlore*, which survives under the quite sufficiently extravagant title of "Jane la Pâle," of the *bousingot* in literature, of all the innocent absurdities that make us laugh to-day as they are half-parodied and half-lovingly depicted in "Les Jeune-France," in Charles de Bernard, and in a hundred other places. Indeed the most wonderful of Balzac's own wild-goose chases in actual life, the journey which he made to Sardinia in order to prospect for a fortune in the slag-heaps of the ancient mines, was a far more striking moral emblem of the day than any "red waistcoat," or than any of the verbal extravagances which became a fashion, and of which I heard nearly the latest (a comic revenge of time) quite recently in the words, "Victor Hugo? il n'existe pas."

What an absurd time, what a youthful one, and yet what promise and what performance! Nothing arrested, nothing could for more than half a century arrest, the conquering march of the movement that set out—it is unnecessary to say precisely when or precisely under whose leadership, but in the days of the last legitimate King of France. It did not matter what form the literary fashions and follies (if any one pleases) of the day took. Men might age and sink from the joyous or frantic riot of 1830 to the "discouraged generation," as the preface to *Obermann*, I think, has it, of twenty years later. They might turn socialists and neo-Catholics under the Second Republic; complain that they were being "materialised" (and submit to it with exemplary placidity) under the Empire; but still they went on producing masterpieces, and still new generations came

to help them to produce. The first flight—the men whose first work appeared between 1825 and 1840—received a tremendous reinforcement in those who began to write between 1845 and 1860, and the formation of new schools and sects went on even later. Never till 1870 itself was there any sign of decreasing population in the higher ranks of literature; and even after that the veterans and the better of the somewhat practised recruits did well and worshipfully.

And yet, wonderful as is the procession and succession of the mere names, and easy as it would be, if a mere catalogue were less uninviting, to fill one of these pages with them, while keeping well to the first and second rank, the variety and excellence of the work which they accomplished are more wonderful still. Never was there in French literature such variety; rarely in any literature such excellence. To begin with the style which, if not exactly the highest, is the special glory of this period, think only of the French novel as it was before, and the French novel as it has been since, the third decade of this century! Certainly books of interest—nay, masterpieces—had not been wanting earlier. The catalogue which begins with *La Princesse de Clèves* and ends with *Adolphe* is not a catalogue which need fear publication, or shirk letters of gold. But if in its best items it deserves this description, there are comparatively few of them, for the hundred and fifty years, as compared with half the time since; and the mass of work is utterly different. It may be said with a certain amount of truth that second-class novels after their own day are never legible except with difficulty; but I should not myself fear to put the second-class novels of the eighteenth century and those of the nineteenth before the equal criticism of, say, the twenty-fifth. It was not that

there was little demand for novel-writing in France before the example of Scott and his enormous success fired the imagination of the French, and drew them on to practise the kind in which Scott had succeeded, as well as others which he had never tried. On the contrary, though the ill-luck of Balzac and the badness of his early work are things equally uncontested, we know that long before *Les Chouans* revealed him, he could get sixty, eighty, a hundred pounds (prices corresponding to twice or thrice so much to-day in England, and, as I am told, equal, without any such multiplication, to what is paid in England for very respectable work from unknown or not very successful writers) for things formless, styleless, devoid alike of just analysis and inventive fancy. But until he and his generation set to work in earnest, nothing but occasional and exceptional things like *Adolphe* itself lightened the darkness of French fiction.

How suddenly, and with what a blaze of light, the illumination came everybody ought to know. In one year, to speak with only pardonable hyperbole, the French public was browsing the thistles of the Vicomte d'Arincourt, or of "Lord R'Hoone" (otherwise Honoré de Balzac himself in his thistle-salad days); the next, or almost the next, all the fish, flesh, fowl, and fruit of fiction were set before it. Hugo began the series of stories, as often gigantesque as gigantic, far less often perfect than imperfect, which was to last for half a century, and to enrich French prose with piles of fantastic architecture such as it had never seen before, and with certain figures and scenes of incomparable beauty. Balzac, forcing his way at last through that astonishing husk or shell of his, was to construct a building less gorgeous as mere literature, but according to some the greatest thing of its kind, and according

to none unworthy of respectful amazement at its range, its intricacy, and the solid truth of its materials of human observation. Mérimée, observing that severer style which the example of Châteaubriand partly, and partly also the mere lapse of time, had put out of fashion—applying it, too, in the first place to subjects quite as romantic as those of the most lawless of the innovators—had already begun, and was in his leisurely fashion to continue, the series of little masterpieces, jealously restricted in number and scale, which were to exhibit almost the whole gamut of the century from fanciful romance to pessimist realism, and to show in germ what hundreds of novelists were merely to develop, and in most cases to over-cultivate. Dumas, busy with the theatre, was to be a little later with those matchless stories for the story's sake, which, though never defrauded of their popularity, were long defrauded of their praise, on the principle apparently that anything so pleasant must necessarily be wrong.

Whether nowadays the name of George Sand ought to be ranked with these may be a matter for debate between critics. Assuredly she has lost, and that not merely with the many, what Dumas has not lost with the many and has gained with the few. But till her death both critics and people united in placing her at least on a level with the best of the four, and nobody can deny the novelty, the fertility, the various vigour and vividness of her work. And round these grouped themselves, at once or by degrees, Gautier, with his impeccable description, and his frequently unsurpassable appeal to passionate fancy; Vigny, with his austere thought and classical form; the undisciplined, but for the moment powerful, invention of Eugène Sue; the delicate art of Charles de Bernard; the pure and yet never “goody” morality of Jules Sandeau; the

lesser but abundant and engrossing romantic talent of Féval and Soulié and Achard; the exuberance of Méry; the distinction of Gozlan, a little overvalued then, a little undervalued since; the fantastic prose-poetry of Nodier, an elder, and (still more quintessenced) of Gérard, a younger, member of the group; while apart, half unrecognised, but "full," as the French say, "of future" and of influence, the strange satiric criticism of Beyle, not quite universal or veracious, less real than realist, anticipated the corruption of the coming age, and observed the tradition of that of the age which was already for some time past. All these filled up the tale, and even these did not exhaust it.

It might seem hard for the *epigoni* of such a group to live up to the reputation and the deeds of their elders; but they did it to no small extent, and in one instance, Flaubert, equalled, if they did not surpass, the very greatest of these forerunners. And to Flaubert, himself a host, we have to add the touching and prolific talent of Feuillet (whose recent disfavour with critics is merely an instance of the fallacy of thinking that because what is unpopular may be art, what is popular cannot be); the somewhat vulgar but vigorous Voltairianism of About; the slight and soon quenched but real and individual gift of Henry Murger; the extreme cleverness of Alexandre Dumas *fils* , who seems to have made a point of reversing his father's order, and commencing novelist in order to proceed in drama; with lastly, and as a kind of parallel to Beyle in the other group, though in point of style, not thought, the not quite admirable but certainly influential non-naturalism of "les deux Goncourt," who have taught half the present [1895] generation to write or miswrite, just as Beyle taught another half (in cross division) of it to think or misthink.

It is curious to pause and reflect on the huge gap in the furniture of a tolerably well-read brain which would be made by the non-existence of these men and their work. What a measureless loss and absence, now that we have known, to us who know—what a vast, if unsuspected, vacancy for those who came too early to know it—would be made by the annihilation of this world of fancy! Good-bye to Han and the bear, to Esmeralda and the goat, to the death of Frollo, and to all the long procession of moving, if not always convincing, phantasmagoria that ranges from *Le beau Pécopin* and the *Chasseur Noir* to the placid waves slowly mounting as Gilliat sits unmoved in the granite chair. There is no more—there is not, and by hypothesis never has been or will be, any Human Comedy; the *peau de chagrin* will not shrink for us, nor the eyes of Paquita shine, nor Cousin Pons suffer and collect, nor Cousine Bette plot mischief. And all the enormous province of Balzac's great rival, of the person whom Balzac patronised as a "charmant conteur," regretting that he should meddle with the historical novel, is left unto us desolate! No Felton descends the rope-ladder with Milady clasping his neck. No Grimaud crouches behind the chine of that grim cask of Porto. We—the *five* of us—shall not hold the bastion against the whole garrison of Rochelle, or endeavour to champion that exceedingly undeserving Henriot against the Guises, or sit on the wall and talk, interestingly but at great length, to Aure de Montalais, or share a hundred and a thousand other doings and sayings unmatched in their kind. Herodias and Ahasuerus will never exchange remarks across the trifling interval of Behring Straits for our benefit, nor the eyes of Clarimonde glitter chrysoprase to balance Paquita's gold, nor Lampourde and Sigognac fight the most famous of all fictitious

bouts of swordsmanship, nor the Venus d'Ille (*espèce de géant verdâtre*) extend her bronze arms to welcome and destroy her unwilling lover. Mr Du Maurier could never have written, or at least entitled, his last novel, for "Trilby, Le Lutin d'Argail," would not exist, nor La Fée aux Miettes, most pathetically whimsical of Queen Mab's train, nor Inès de las Sierras, nor the Filles de Feu of Gérard the hapless. The innocent naughtinesses of the *Vie de Bohème* and the crazy virtue of the *Buveurs d'Eau* would be annihilated together; and in later days the greyer and less splendid, but perhaps more lasting, pictures of the gallery where Emma Bovary reigns an unhonoured queen would have no existence. Yet each of this long list is but a representative, a "mere captain of fifty," when one thinks of the boundless world of imagination which the novelists of these two generations have created.

One enters on more debatable ground in passing (or rather ascending) from the plain of prose fiction to the slopes of Parnassus. Some impression has, I believe, been made on the obstinate British distaste for French poetry, which found a voice not so very long ago even in a man so anxious not to be merely British as Mr Matthew Arnold. But a good deal of it still remains. In any case, it is a valid and capital argument for the theme of this eulogy, or epicede, or whatever it may be called, of French nineteenth-century literature, that by it such impression as has been made on this prejudice has been effected, and by nothing but it. It could never have been possible, after our own issue from the house of bondage, and I do not think it ever will be possible, whatever freaks reaction may play, to get an English taste thoroughly to relish French poetry as it was from the triumph of Racine to the close of the First Empire. It never was really relished

among us even in our own "classical" period. And the fact that long after the barriers had broken down in France, the French education, and in all but a very few cases the French reading, of Englishmen was still confined to the poets and prose-writers of the late seventeenth-eighteenth century, for the most part accounted for the pooriness of English appetite for it. I have sometimes wickedly asked myself, when reading Mr Matthew Arnold's depreciation of Gautier, whether Mr Arnold had really read much of "Théo," and I have been always unable to answer with any confidence in the affirmative. Had he done so—much more had he read modern French poetry generally—he never could have been decoyed by the (in this case almost innocent) log-rolling of certain French critics into his enormous mistake about the literary value of the Guérins, or have fancied, as he evidently did fancy, that French verse has no true lyrical ring. Yet this mistake would have been quite pardonable in anybody at the time when our chapter began; it could, indeed, only have been corrected by going back to old and practically forgotten sources. It was not pardonable after 1830.

Here, too, some foolish things were done at first and since; here, too, there was an indiscriminate, perhaps even an unintelligent, lugging in of foreign models and foreign methods, some of which were extremely ill suited to the genius of the language. But here, too, what an immense and admirable production, what an addition of variety and life to the history of literature! When the period began, save for the grave work of Chénier recently, and the trivial and frivolous work of Panard earlier, hardly any fresh or original rhythm and metre, hardly a new tune or a melody free from the influences of school and rule, had been heard in

France for some hundred and fifty years. And now this changed all at once to a very babel of cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of instruments. By one of those invariable changes and phases of literary history which are so easily recognised by experienced observers that (as few things in literature can) they can be foretold with an almost scientific certainty, romantic poetry is just now out of favour in France—a thing the more amusing in that the most really poetical poet now¹ living there, M. Verlaine, is absolutely nothing but a man of 1830, who happens to have been born thirty or forty years behind time. But these changes of ephemeral criticism, which often delude novices and neophytes, have no power to mislead the critic proper. There were many faults in the school of poetry of which, after Lamartine and Vigny had served as *avant-courriers*, Hugo was captain, which is still, as far as any school is, attended with a very slight change of curriculum, but the last great masters of which died in Théodore de Banville and Leconte de Lisle. But it has in all its best examples, and even in the bulk of it, the one merit—it is poetry. France left off “saying,” as she had done very admirably, and took to “singing” again; even though, as her own old joke goes, some of the things sung might not be worth the trouble of being said. And here, too, how tremendous would be the loss to the lover of poetry if his memory were disfurnished and disarrayed of the gains of these sixty years! It must be a very feeble judgment which allows itself to be hoodwinked or distorted by the fact that Hugo wrote a great deal, and that he and his executors have published a great deal too much, of work that is “reeled off,” so to speak, that has no inevitableness. Such stuff cannot obscure the splendour

¹ Please, again, remember date [1895].

of almost all his earlier and much of his later verse. It may be (unfortunately it would seem it is) true that he refused a struggling friend assistance, on the plea that he had large payments to make, which payments were the instalments of an investment. But what on earth has that to do with *Gastibelza* and the *Chasseur Noir*? It may be undeniable that when he talked politics he usually talked mischievous nonsense; that when he talked religion, philosophy, and so forth, he usually talked nonsense which was chiefly not mischievous because it was too literally nonsense—too much of a nebulous conglomeration of fortuitous phrase-making to have any effect on practice or belief. But what has this to do with *Les Lions* or *Le Petit Roi de Galice*? His faults and his shortcomings, like Milton's, Racine's, Byron's, Heine's, were his own business. The gorgeous music, from crash of bells and clangour of trumpets to the whisper of flute and lyre, with which he broke the silence or the humdrum murmur of French verse, is the business, and will be the business, of all who love poetry, till there are no more books.

Still, though the sentiment of Banville's refrain—

Mais le maître est là-bas, dans l'île—

was as true as it is graceful, the French poetry of the nineteenth century is by no means summed up in Hugo. He is almost as unsurpassed in certain veins of tenderness and delicate suggestion as he is in grandeur and *souffle*; but in many details and divisions of poetical merit he is either altogether to seek, or is frequently equalled and sometimes beaten by others. A strong reaction has set in of late for Lamartine, and it may be readily admitted that between 1850 and 1880, or thereabouts, Lamartine was valued in France,

if nowhere else, a good deal below his deserts. But I am afraid that I have never been able, and never shall be able, to get up much enthusiasm about him. For all the spirituality of his sentimental view of nature, I find it as difficult as Mr Arnold found it, to think him "important." Still, he undoubtedly showed the way; and if his glass was not the greatest or the most exquisite, he drank in it. Vigny, too, owed nothing to Hugo, little to Lamartine; and though his originality exceeded his fertility by a good deal, and his ability in strict form by not a little, such things among his early pieces as *Dolorida*, among his later as the great pessimist descant of nature in *La Maison du Berger*, stand alone in French, and almost among European, poetry for a certain austere despair which is less conventional than Young and less thin than Leopardi. It is quite a mistake to think, though it is sometimes said, that Gautier as a poet was a mere satellite of Hugo. The style is as different as the thought; and if *Albertus* is a mere clever piece of partly Byronic youthfulness, there is abundance of other matter in the too scanty store of verse between the *Comédie de la Mort* and the *Émaux et Camées*, which simply needs to be read by any one who can see poetry, in order to disclose the poetry that is in it. Brizeux and Barbier, men much praised in their day, perhaps had in that day most of the praise that is due to them; yet there have been times—not in France only—when Brizeux' descriptive and Barbier's satiric force would have made and perhaps kept them capital reputations. Constant repetition by those who have learnt a little of the matter may have made others sick of hearing of "the sonnet of Arvers"; but Arvers is only one of a score or more poets, during the two generations of the poetic movement of the century, who have done one, two, or

twenty things that in any other period would have deserved an immortal memory. And then there is Musset.

Nobody that I can think of among the poets of Europe during this century is so difficult to write of as Musset; for nobody has had such a singular faculty of exciting literary manias for and against himself, of the most diverse kinds and in the most diverse people. By turns in his life a spoiled darling and an awful example; by turns since his death an idol of youth, a stick to beat other poets (especially Hugo) with, and a whipping-post on which to exercise the scorn of the latest generation for facile sentiment and facile rhyming,—it is equally impossible to praise or to blame him without having missiles from the most opposite quarters launched at one's head. That he did very little, and that his doing so little was not, as in Gautier's case, the result of the working of a malignant fate, but of wilful or reckless squandering of his powers, is quite undeniable. That the looseness, sometimes amounting to slipshodness, of his form was at least as much owing to sheer indolence as to the indifference of genius, may be granted. That his sentiment, his thought, his quality generally, are often chargeable with cheapness, with commonplace, with that most offensive of conventionalities, which consists in taking the unconventional view or side because it is fashionable, is hardly to be gainsaid. But (and here the "but" is not of the grudging kind, but of the other) can it be really contended by any one who loves poetry, any one who knows it, that we can do without, that we are to refuse or abuse, the best work of him who wrote at least half-a-dozen songs of such a haunting verbal melody that they are practically independent of any other,—the author of the best things in *Namouna*, in *Rolla*, in

Les Marrons du feu, the poet, for no other word will do, of the happier parts of the *Nuits*? No; he shall be debited with faults as many as any one pleases, but in an Academy of Academies, in a selection of poetical immortals, the exclusion of Alfred de Musset would leave a seat vacant which no one else could fill. And that, it may be asserted a thousand times, is the only test of real value.

And I do not think that this real lover of poetry, to whom we must constantly appeal, will, even without taking into consideration the fact that the first school covered in Hugo's case and in some others (especially that of the estimable if not very intoxicating verse of Laprade) most of the second period also, find much less interest in the second period itself and its special authors. Its three chief representatives—Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, and Banville—won their way slowly to recognition at home and still more so abroad: their reputation when it came was fairly solid and more than fairly deserved. Whatever objections—and it is not here necessary to discuss the validity of them—may have been taken, or may be still taken, to the matter of the *Fleurs du Mal*¹, nobody now denies the enormous influence as a master in verse of their author on those who have followed him, and few deny his technical merits. M. Leconte de Lisle, the absolutely last to die of the great race, had, in like manner, conquered his place, and, unlike Baudelaire, before he died. There has been more demur against the irreproachable form and the inoffensive matter of the author of *Trente-Six Ballades Joyeuses*, on the score of triviality, mechanism, emptiness of thought and weight: nor can it be denied that Banville, like most poets whose form is above their

¹ It may be just desirable to remind readers of the full treatment of Baudelaire in this same volume (1924).

matter, would have done better if he had done less. But here, too, there was a charm which could be felt, and an accomplishment which could not be ignored.

The minor poet is not in favour just now¹ in England—or rather, to speak with absolute accuracy, he is undergoing a penance the opposite of *laudatur et alget*: for though he is abused he is (especially if he prints in limited editions and knows how to produce the Crack of Boom) bought. Also, we have many minor poets, and being a poetical people, as is admitted even by those who in the same breath call us prosaic, have generally had many. Yet we have had¹ nothing since Elizabeth's time so curious and so interesting as the regimented minor poetry which found its utterance in the successive *Parnasses* of thirty to twenty years ago, and which, projecting its best exponents, such as MM. Sully Prudhomme and François Coppée, into positions officially or by courtesy "major," has changed its name rather than its methods, and is fully alive to-day. The classical characteristics of France and French indeed reappear in these regiments: they are very like each other, and they are also exceedingly like themselves. But for this very reason they present a more uniform, and therefore a more curious, poetical development than their British brethren. No one, perhaps, would call them one of the great features or achievements, one of the capital pages, of our literary chapter. But they testify, as such things always do testify, to the amount of the poetic spirit which has been set free in France during the years of their appearance, and to the powerful stimulus of the really great poets who preceded or accompanied them.

To go through all the really glorious gains of these sixty years in other branches of literature would be

¹ Please, again, remember date.

impossible, and, if possible, probably disgusting. But we cannot look anywhere without the same sense of the enormous, the incalculable, gap in memory and understanding, in profit and in pleasure, that would be made if these things were not. Others who are fonder of the theatre, as the theatre, than I can pretend to be, would no doubt speak better of that part of the matter than I can. But it is hardly too much to say that, while up to the third quarter of the century France was as often as not borrowing dramas and dramatic subjects from other nations, from that time to the present all the nations of the earth have imported, and some of them have almost contented themselves with importing, the *article de Paris* for their dramatic uses. From the literary side, even after leaving out the whole of Scribe (or everything in which he had not Legouv   for a collaborator), and while sternly excluding farce and melodrama and dramatic miscellanies, who that has ever read them, whether he has seen them or not, can forget the dainty beauty of the Musset *Proverbe* (never wholly recovered since, despite fair essays from M. Feuillet and M. Pailleron); the luxuriant vigour of the elder, and the cunning craftsmanship of the younger Dumas; the unfailing fun of Labiche; the adequacy and skill of Augier; and, rarest of all in this age of ours, the really poetic drama (which is a different thing from drama in verse) of Banville? From *Fantasio* to *Gringoire*, from *Henri Trois et sa Cour* to the *Voyage de M. Perrichon*, what a range of interest! what a plenty and variety of diversion!

In passing from poetry and drama and prose fiction to more serious prose, one comes no doubt to matter somewhat more contentious. There are those who argue, not with a mere appeal to authority but with more or less specious reasoning, that while the changes

introduced by the Romantic movement in verse must be admitted even by conservative critics, after the first shock is over, to have been partly if not unmixedly good, those in prose are to be pronounced partly if not unmixedly bad. Châteaubriand, they say, killed French prose, or at least dealt it a mortal blow; the men of 1830 and their successors have been doing their best to prevent it ever coming to life again. There is just enough truth in this to save it from being dismissed as mere stupidity or mere extravagance; and the truth no doubt is felt with especial force just now, when all the more brilliant examples of the revolutionary period in prose have passed away. The old specially French prose, as pure and bright as spring water, if also nearly as colourless, absolutely unambiguous in meaning, unless a distinct double meaning was intended, without a superfluous epithet or a displaced particle, "as clear as diamond and as hard," like Queen Mary's heart, is very nearly, if not quite, dead. Mérimée was about the last man who wrote anything like it, in its perfection, and even in Mérimée the prismatic qualities of the water somewhat exceeded its perfect clearness. In its lower form, in the general academic variety, M. Jules Simon and one or two others still present it in very fair condition; but even they have felt the change, and all of them are old men, with no apparent successors in their art. It has gone with the line-engraving it so much resembled, and it is perhaps even more unlikely ever to come back again to any but a galvanised life.

But putting aside what Mr Browning called the "old woe of the world"—the impossibility of keeping the one good, fair, wise thing unchanged—it must be admitted that the French prose of the century has brought many consolations,—that if *le roi est mort*, his

successor has been very much alive. And what is more, if that successor cannot in one way fill his father's shoes, the father most assuredly could not have filled the son's in many. It was the defect of the old French prose that, admirable as it was, it made everything that was done in it too much alike, and also made it very difficult to do certain things at all. All serious writing tended more and more to the style of the academic *éloge*, and if there were things which it was difficult to mention or to discuss thoroughly either in the *style noble* or the *style badin*, which it admitted, why, you left them alone. That would never have done for the immense variety and the energetic inquisitiveness of the last two generations. And the spirit of the age was certainly justified of her children. How much they owed to Châteaubriand few competent critics, however qualified their admiration for the author of *Les Martyrs* himself, are likely to deny. The influence of Châteaubriand in prose was a far more widespread and a far more original influence than that of Hugo in verse, for many other places were producing, or soon to produce, verse innovators when Besançon produced hers, while Saint-Malo bore the revolutioniser of prose decades before any other town in France could boast a coadjutor to him. But when the full blossoming time of the thirties came, every division of serious prose found, and found almost at once, practitioners of the new styles as vigorous, as expert, as those of verse, and perhaps more generally acceptable as well as profitable. And one of the most noteworthy things is the way in which the various manners overlapped. A too meticulous arranger, one who will insist on a class for everybody and everybody in his class, must be horribly puzzled and annoyed by this promiscuity. What ticket is he to put on Cousin and

Rémusat at one end of the period? what on Renan and Taine at the other? All were in a way philosophers, all in a way critics, all in a way historians. Perhaps it is not a too facile cutting of the knot to say that they—like almost all the writers of the century—have been critics first of all, and that all is fish that comes to the critic's net. Certainly in no special department of prose is the time so noteworthy, in none has it added so much to the stock and store of thought and knowledge, as in that of criticism, literary and general.

And its special kind of criticism, the kind which in the purely literary division brought forth Sainte-Beuve, the greatest¹ critic of the modern world, especially required a varied and not too straitly ruled or limited style. For the criticism of the nineteenth century, which France indeed borrowed from Germany and England, but which she carried further than either of these countries had yet done, is not deductive; it is not academic; it ought not to be, though it very often is, declamatory. It is first of all adaptive; it first of all gives an impression of the subject or author, a reflection of it in the mould or mirror of the critic's mind; and to do this, it is absolutely necessary that it should to some extent adjust its style as well as its thought to the thing criticised. A good criticism of this kind is by no means nothing if not critical; it is a story, a history, a philosophical course, a description, a picture in itself, and it has need of the tools of all these separate trades in order properly to perform its own.

Yet the period assuredly did not lack in the persons of these critics, and of others, artists in prose who were

¹ As this is a very dangerous word to use let me say that I use it in the sense of *combined* dimension, of winning "on points" if I understand that phrase correctly. There are critics who rise to heights and dive to depths that he never reaches; there are others who have more charm, more humour, more this, that, or the other. But with marks allowed and faults admitted *all round* he wins I think (1924).

not at all, or who were not in the first place, critics, and who have filled our minds, not (as the critic must at best be contented to do) with views of things and with the faculty of viewing things, but with the things themselves. Of the men who are more remarkable for work of fact than for work of expression—of those who have informed more than they have inspired—not many of any age save the very greatest have made more mark than Comte and Littré, than Barante and Guizot, than Thierry and Thiers (a pair how near in spelling, and how far apart in manner and merit), than Tocqueville and Montalembert, than Louis Blanc and Taine. Yet some of these might claim no small place in the other division, the division of those who are masters of saying as well as masters of something to say; and not a few others, from Sismondi to Caro, and from Jouffroy to Lanfrey, may reproachfully ask why they are omitted from both.

And, lastly, of the real prose-men, the men who would still have written splendidly if they had had nothing to write of but broomsticks, and who in almost all cases have had much more than broomsticks to write about. It is the fashion just now to depreciate the volcanic and apocalyptic manner of Lamennais, which yet as an influence had few equals, and as an indication of the new forces and fashions not many superiors. It is not customary to find many enthusiasts for Cousin, who, all the same, was a golden writer at his best. There is Quinet, perhaps never in the very first class, owing to the coincidence, not envious but unfortunate, of such overshadowing figures as Victor Hugo and Michelet on either side of him, but yet a man who would have been something like a giant if they had not been there, and who was not of ordinary stature even in their presence. And then there are

Hugo and Michelet themselves—the former, if sometimes in prose ridiculous, yet often sublime; the latter, the most astonishing example of fluency that is never commonplace and exuberant, that is seldom merely extravagant, to be found in French, if not in any literature. Here, yet once more, is Gautier, the Chrysostom of journalism, the Hercules of the impromptu, who could not write a sentence that was not very nearly a masterpiece, and who wrote so many sentences about subjects and in places where no masterpiece was deserved or desired; here Saint-Victor, the paragon at once and the “awful example” of the non-natural style of writing, of verbal embroidery and enamelling. And here, last to be mentioned, as almost last to go, is Renan, in whom—whatever may be thought of his matter, however the logician may quarrel with his reasoning, the man of learning with his knowledge, the critic with his sense of the principles and his observance of the practice of criticism—almost every quality that prose can have except sincerity, manliness, and strength, was shown to the full and to the last. The French call Renan the greatest prose-writer of Europe in his time. That he was not, for it was the time of Carlyle and Newman, of Mr Ruskin and Mr Froude. But he was, at least after the death of Michelet, the greatest purely prose-writer of France, and he was probably the most perfect prose-writer of Europe, the one with fewest faults and most happily co-ordinated merits of mere style, after the death of Mérimée. Towards the last in particular his failings in strength and his frequent faults in taste, as far as substance were concerned, were made up in the *Drames Philosophiques* and in his minor writings by such an almost diabolic suavity and grace of phrase that the thing could go no further. The long and glorious chapter

could hardly have closed more fitly than with the death of himself and Taine—both not innocent of “decadence,” not free from the signs of decay, but the one as consummate an example of sweetness somewhat over-ripe as the other was of not all-accomplished strength.

And now they are all gone—though doubtless their work abides with us. There is none now writing in France who can challenge, or has yet given signs of being likely soon to challenge, the first rank, or anything at all approaching it. The tide, which had so long and so magnificent a flood, so unusual a stationary time of fulness, has been slowly ebbing, is not far now from at least a neap low-water, and shows very little signs of flow. Of course this statement will or may be itself challenged more or less hotly or contemptuously by those who think it outrage and treason to the Present ever to admit any inferiority in it to the Past, or any want of promise for the Future. Steadier heads and wider ranges of sight know that this is as much a fallacy as the blindest laudation of the past merely because it is the past. It is quite true that there is no death, no absolute decay, in literature—that there are merely fallows, rests, turning-places. But that there are such turning-places, such rests and halts and fallows, only extreme ignorance of literary history can deny. And that letters in France have apparently reached such a state nothing, as it seems to me, but an extremely inadequate and unbalanced criticism can attempt to assert. One literary genius, whose genius is as undoubted as its application is wayward, abnormal, and not seldom discreditable, France does possess in M. Paul Verlaine. But, in the first place, M. Verlaine is far from “the centre,” and is extremely unlikely to draw much nearer to it; while in the second,

he is so far from being a new-comer that it is, I think, near thirty years since his first verses appeared. Another, in prose, she has not long lost in M. de Maupassant; but Maupassant also had been writing for no inconsiderable time, and he, again, was of the eccentric and flawed, not of the central and complete, order of genius. And of these two, while one is dead, the other is to the very last degree unlikely to live to much purpose.

Of others, who is there? Those who are left or are coming on are, it was said, very respectable people, but are they anything more? It may be affirmed that they are, by those who can bring themselves to think *Les Rougon-Macquart* a worthy pendant to, if not a distinct advance upon, the *Comédie Humaine*; who have persuaded themselves that the painter of Tartarin is in other capacities than that most happy one, a person of genius as well as of talent; who take M. Sully Prudhomme and M. Coppée—writers of whom it is impossible to speak without quite unfeigned esteem—for great poets; who think M. Jules Lemaître an improvement on Sainte-Beuve; and who see in “Pierre Loti” something immeasurably superior to Gautier and Fromentin. And the elegy of this article will of course seem even more pitiable or more outrageous to those who see a real mystagogue in M. Joséphin Peladan, a consummate prose-man in M. Maurice Barrès, and a new Victor Hugo (if only it could be admitted that *ce pauvre Hugo a existé*, though he does not now) in M. Jean Moréas. Nay, I am not sure that even these three brilliant reputations are not a little stale for the most ardent admirers of modernity; that there is not something a little passed, “a little 1890,” about them. Indeed it must be confessed that the extremest youth of Paris is giving at least so much sign of a coming

renaissance, that it is more enamoured of foreign writers than of its own. Ibsen and Strindberg, and the young German gentleman whose works I sometimes read, but whose name I always forget (he drew that delightful picture of the husband and the Third Party, drowning themselves at the bottom of the back-garden), with certain of our own poets and prophets, whom there may be some delicacy in naming, stand higher in the good graces of the Sacred Band than any Frenchman.

But none of these pretensions—the comparatively reasonable one of the first class no more than the almost purely fantastic one of the last—can sustain itself for any length of time before the bar of a really well-informed and catholic criticism. No one would deny great merit to some of the elder and middle-aged, and considerable to some of the younger, writers of French to-day. Of the latter, M. Paul Margueritte and M. Marcel Prévost will tell short stories, now that Mr Stevenson is dead, with anybody in the world except Mr Kipling—indeed the short story, one of the earliest triumphs of French prose, appears to be the very stronghold of the literature, into which at its greatest pinches it retires, and where it holds out for better days. Nor are the two I have mentioned without some excellent supporters. But I cannot say that, outside of the story, I have seen much work by very young French writers that seems to me really distinguished. M. Barrès, who might or might not like to be called very young, is perhaps the chief exception; and in the topsy-turvy style (the style which Pétrus Borel and others of the irregulars of 1830 practised), *Le Jardin de Bérénice* and its fellows may no doubt take high rank with the mere literary critic, hard as they will find it to pass the medical examination of the critical

moralist. And if we go back a little to that middle generation already glanced at, we shall find, of course, many men of whom, except by comparison with what went before them, it would be absurd and impertinent to speak with depreciation. Those who can take no actual pleasure in any part of the Rougon-Macquart series, except perhaps in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, in the beginning of *L'Œuvre*, and in parts of *Dr Pascal*, will hardly refuse admiration (if they be of the critical stamp in which liking and admiration are independent and disconnected sets of machinery) to the force of will and the power of labour displayed in the whole, and to the scattered successes of craftsmanship as distinguished from creation in the parts. Those who most abominate the personalities, and who most clearly see the indebtedness of M. Daudet, will, even apart from their gratitude for Tartarin, that treasonable and delightful caricature of the South by a Southern, remember many mirthful and not a few pathetic passages in all the work from *Le Petit Chose* to *Sapho*. If M. André Theuriet had not, like certain of our own folk who could be named, frittered away in scores of books what would have made perfection of some four or five, he would probably have made the four or five, and they would have been, or have been near, that perfection. At least a dozen other names, whom it is only not desirable to specify because one might miss one or two with as good a claim as the others, occur to make out the list of novelists who are fairly in the first division of the second class. I wish I could find a similar batch of poets; but except those already named, and perhaps M. Richepin, I am unable to discover them, unless anybody insists that the modest honour be accorded to M. de Herédia, maker of faultlessly null sonnets (*vice* Joséphin Soulayr dead) and member

of the Academy, or to M. Deroulède, Tyrtæus of the latest fashion, and a right honest patriot and songster, if no great poet. M. Loti I must leave to M. Loti's admirers (I never was fond of imperfectly preserved *pot-pourri*); and of M. Bourget I would rather not speak, because M. Bourget almost alone of his contemporaries, seems to me, much as he has written, to have something within him which has not yet come out. No one can have more respect than I have for the critical faculty and the admirable learning of M. Brunetière and M. Faguet. They fill well and worthily a place with which any critic may content himself; but neither of them is exactly Sainte-Beuve, and I am not sure that either quite equals Taine or Scherer or M. Montégut. As I approach the name of M. Anatole France I own that I have need of all my critical virtue: one is horribly tempted to be a Roman *judex* for the nonce, and attend to Sylvestre Bonnard on the one hand and "mon bon Maître" on the other, as the advocate produces them *sordidatos*, pleading for their father, and bringing with them a train not merely of other fictitious personages, but of excellent deeds in criticism recently and in verse of old. No living French writer has to me the charm of M. France: I would give all I am worth, and a great deal more, to be able to write (if not always to think) like him. But if I am asked to vote for him as a writer absolutely of the first class, I am afraid I must refuse.

For on all these, as it seems to me, there is the curse which rests on the writers of the latter, the falling, end of every great period, unless they are intrinsically and by accident as great as Milton and Browne, as Hobbes and (latest of all) Dryden, were at the end of our own first great time, as Tennyson and others were at the end of our second. There is in them the distinct, the irrepressible evidence of the school, without that

mixture of native and unscholastic raciness which atones in the earlier stage of such periods for some very direct and obvious following. The remembrance of that admirable story, which we owe to Dickens, about "Mr Testator" and Lyons Inn, about the ghost or inconvenient reality who walked into the chambers stored with somewhat cavalierly borrowed furniture, and uttered the single syllable "Mine" as he touched piece after piece, is always present when we read their work. It is often good, and sometimes excellent; but one feels as one never does with the greatest literary artists—however closely they may sometimes follow, however shamelessly they may sometimes plagiarise—the presence of the literary ancestor. No Balzac, no Zola; and I think that we may admit many faults in the *Comédie Humaine*, and yet think that on the whole we could dispense, having it, with *Les Rougon-Macquart*, for all its more precise and particular emphasising of the blessed doctrine of heredity and the *lésion* and so forth. Take away Dickens and Thackeray and a large number of French persons of lesser distinction, and how much will be left of M. Daudet? M. Richepin is an extremely clever versifier,—would he ever have written a line as he has written it but for Victor Hugo? Maupassant, as I have said, did not give me this feeling, for all his resemblances to Flaubert and others; and M. Verlaine does not give it, despite the tolerable certainty that if Baudelaire had not been he would not be. But M. Viaud does, when I think of those fathers of his above noted and others; and even M. France does, though in his case it is difficult to assign any single original, and he is rather a literary mosaic, assorted and composed with flashes of original genius, than a literary *pastiche*. But over all, and still more over their younger contemporaries, the sense

hovers, the sense now of imitation, now of unconscious descent, now of desire to get a little further, now of direct revolt after a fashion—for this also is a kind of imitation. They are not free like sons,—they serve obediently or contumaciously.

And these, I take it, are the signs, assured and unmistakable to careful students, of what for want of a better name we call by the rather bad one of decadence in literature. To what degrees this decadence will go, how long it will last, how soon it will be succeeded by a fresh real flowering, no one can say. There are precedents for a speedy and precedents for a very long postponed renaissance; and what is more, no precedents are exactly applicable in such a case. Without venturing too far on prophecy, it may perhaps be said that a rather long postponement in France, as perhaps also in other countries, is on the whole more probable than a very short one. The current types and motives, which have changed very little since the first beginning of nineteenth-century literature proper, are getting a good deal worn and used: the sense of the *cliché*, of the stock phrase, is evidenced in the most unmistakable if not in the most satisfactory way by cumbrous and acrobatic attempts to get out of it, by cheap parody of the conventional, by easy tricks of inversion and unexpectedness. Gongorism and Goncourtism have a very much closer resemblance than Macedon and Monmouth. And yet so tricky are the Muses that nobody need be surprised to find these apprehensions agreeably disappointed, to find *Le Pèlerin Passionné* succeeded by something as much better as the *Faerie Queene* is better than Stanyhurst's *Virgil*, and the very novelists and tale-tellers of the day excelling themselves as much as the author of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* excelled the author of *Bug-Jargal*.

Let all this be as it may. The fresh chapter may open sooner, later, or—for such things have been uncomfortable enough to happen in literature—not at all; but we have had that which is now closing, and it is as certain that it is closing, or has closed, as that we have had it. Some slight attempt has been made here to summarise, however inadequately, the gains of it—gains so great and manifold that by their very bulk and number they are apt to fail of realisation and recognition—to indicate in a sort of outline the vast discoveries in the world of imagination and expression which the man of 1825 hardly had at all, on which the man of 1835 was only just entering, and which lie open to the man of 1895 for easy travel and enjoyment when and how he pleases. But the chief object is to recall to readers the fact that we are sitting, that we have actually sat, at the side of the deathbed of one of the great periods of European literature. It is passing, it has almost if not quite passed before our eyes, as nothing of the kind may pass again in the lifetime of even the youngest. In science they mark their transits of Venus or of Mercury with a greater exactness, and observe them in a more business-like fashion. But that is no reason why in literature we should leave events of the kind unmarked and unrecorded.

“Who saw him die?”

“I,” said the fly.

And it was a very respectable thing of the fly, for all his littleness and insignificance, to be sufficiently capable of noting great events to make the observation¹.

¹ Almost thirty years after I see little to change in or add to this save in one respect, that of M. Anatole France, who will be found again, and fully dealt with, in this volume. To the chief names of those recently dead, Pierre Loti and Maurice Barrès, I do not feel called on to make amends.

X

A FRENCH MAN OF LETTERS OF ALL WORK¹ [1904]

ALMOST at the extreme end of his life, and therefore not many years ago, M. Edmond de Goncourt, to whom we must—some of us I fear a little ungraciously—acknowledge constant indebtedness for information about the personalia of modern French literature, tells in his *Memoirs* a pleasing story which he heard from Alphonse Daudet. Daudet had been dining in the company of a young gentleman who had already written two or three articles or articlets, and who, therefore, spoke with full sense of literary responsibility. Somebody had been rash enough to mention Flaubert. “Hardly,” said the young gentleman, “hardly do I honour him with my contempt!” And a little earlier M. de Goncourt had told us that the glory of Gautier was fading before that of Flaubert. Therefore, looking before and after, and using the due literary mathematics, it may be concluded—and the conclusion could be supported with more positive evidence—that the young gentleman would not to-day even honour Gautier with anything approaching to contempt—with any consideration at all. Indeed it is not very long since I saw it stated, with a sort of awe, that the literature of France was in such a state of palminess

¹ I have written so much and printed it so frequently on Gautier that it may seem superfluous to include this paper. But it has never seen print, although it was delivered as a Taylor Lecture at Oxford twenty years ago; and it takes its subject from a different and wider angle than any other treatment of mine dealing with an author more and more neglected. As elsewhere, I must beg particular attention to the date at which this paper was originally composed (1924).

that there was a new school every ten years or "by 'r Lady fifteen." So a man who died thirty-two¹ years ago must be on the one basis of calculation at two, on the other at three removes, from actuality: while he cannot hope that the circle has brought him round again to resurrection.

This, however, is not exactly the calculus on which I propose to base this lecture. At the same time my own postulates will not lack audacity, for I shall ask you to concede two things—at any rate for a brief space and till I have conspicuously failed to make them good—after which it will be just that they shall go with it down the current. The first is that in matters of literature there is *no* time, or fashion, or school, in the preferential or disqualifying sense—that a thing is neither better nor worse for being old, or middle-aged, or new. The second is a more parlous proposition—that long practice in criticism will sometimes—it should always, but no matter—confer the power of isolating and appreciating perennial quality.

This last is a large, perhaps you will say an enormous and unconscionable, claim. Undoubtedly all critics have not justified it—are not justifying it. Probably none has it at once. Probably all are fallible in respect to it on this or that side of their own tastes, knowledge, disposition. But I do not know why it should be considered impossible to attain, or arrogant to pretend to, a power of diagnosis in this department similar to that which is freely granted to experts in others who have given to the attainment, time, pains, a certain amount of self-sacrifice (for if the critic determines only to admire what he likes he is ruined) and the other fares that one has to pay in life's journey.

¹ Fifty-two now, so that the "removes" are "+ twice" and "+ four" now (1924).

However all this may be, there is no writer, contested or contestable, of the past century in the two languages of modern Europe with which I happen to be best acquainted, on whose position in literature I am more completely at peace with myself than is my case with Théophile Gautier. I have grown to think highly of some of whom, when I first was attracted by him, I did not think highly at all. I have had to discover and to confess a considerable diminution of respect for some who were my favourites before him or with him. I have no doubt about *him* whatever. But others, including some great ones, notoriously have had and have doubts, which it may not be idle to take in hand. And it seems to me that they will be best taken in hand with a constant side-view to that predicament of his fate which I have put forward in the title of this lecture. With the possible exception of Southey, I cannot think of any man of letters, French or English, during the nineteenth century, who was so absolutely sentenced to a life at the galleys—who *had* to be such a man of letters of all work from his literary cradle to his actual grave. Others have had spells of the oar and the chain; none but these, so far as I can remember, among the greater writers of the two countries have been refused, or have refused themselves, the shortest ticket-of-leave.

It is not mere flightiness, or mere juvenile or senile paradox, which has been unfavourable to Gautier; nor have those who judged him harshly been merely those who were *a priori* certain to do so. We can imagine (and enjoy the situation while expecting and disregarding the consequence) what must have been the sensations, and what the resolves, of that redoubtable and respectable censor to whom, on his first introduction to the Magny dinner, Théo strolled up and

said, "I hope you will kindly compromise yourself next time. You see we all compromise ourselves here: and it will not do for you to sit silent and take notes." But the case is very different when we come to such a critic as M. Émile Faguet, whose curious and partially Balaamite attitude to Gautier is probably known to a good many of my hearers. M. Faguet could have had no personal slights or tricks to avenge; he is¹ certainly not destitute of critical catholicity; he has admirable critical equipment; he has not the fear of the young person too constantly or too disproportionately before his mind. Yet on Gautier he becomes almost Macaulayish in the crudity of his antitheses and the violence of his lights and shades. Théo "has absolutely nothing to tell us." He "has got no ideas." He has no "sensibility." He has no imagination. He has no invention. He can manage neither characters, nor scenes, nor figures, nor adventures. He has perhaps fancy; but this only lasts for short bursts. He does not really like literature, and is not well read. Yet he has "done exquisite things"; he has "achieved the astonishing *tour de force* of plastic criticism"; his art is "singularly seductive"; he knows to admiration every resource of French style; indeed he produces effects "of which one never could have thought that French was capable." You think—that is anybody who has not read the article thinks—that this is only the old device of stepping back to leap farther—that the earlier restrictions have been put in to enhance the final eulogy. Not in the least. "He will perish," M. Faguet thinks: "the whole of him will perish." At the very best he will become a curiosity of literature: the *bibelot* of a connoisseur here and there. In fact, if the critic had cared for a figure, he might have com-

¹ The tenses might but need not be altered now (1924).

pared Gautier to that snow-statue of Falguière's which the poet has himself described on the ramparts of beleaguered Paris, exquisite, consummate, ephemeral.

If I were lecturing on M. Faguet, instead of on Gautier, I could without much difficulty show the cause of all this paradox and contradiction—for contradiction after all it is, though it probably was not intentionally paradox. There is the little fault, the positive absence—for which we must always look when a critic is in this mood. M. Faguet betrays it in a single reference—little more than an allusion—to *La Morte Amoureuse*, which he thinks a *diablerie puérile*. Exactly. We have the confession. There is no need to dwell on it or to enquire what a man who calls *La Morte Amoureuse* a puerile diablerie would have said of *The Ancient Mariner* thirty or forty years before, or of *Rose Mary* thirty or forty years after it. The French (and not the French only) dislike of a *kind* appears: we have hit on a little patch of local insensibility. You found out that a witch was a witch by discovering an insensitive spot in her body: you find out that a critic is not a critic by discovering an insensitive spot in his. But, as I have said, I am not discussing M. Faguet. Discussing Gautier, what is the justice of M. Faguet's denials, not as his but in themselves? First of all, there is the famous, the stock reproach of "no ideas." I have sometimes wondered whether M. Faguet remembered a most ingenious and wicked phrase of Gautier's own in an early chapter of the book on Spain, which the critic himself justly admires, about people "cutting each other's throats for the ideas that *they think they have*." A quite harmless and innocent expression? Or a drop of aqua-fortis, a tiny watch-spring file, which will play the mischief with the ideas that people themselves "think they have" and others have not? How

many folks really have ideas? How many ideas are there really to have? Of course if we accept the ideas of ideas—the ideas that people think they have—there is great plenty. Blackberries cease to be competitors. But of the *great* ideas, the real ideas, the ideas that abide and are not casual opinions, or minor facts, there are perhaps not so many: and I do not think that Gautier was much less well supplied with them than other people. And so with the rest. He may not have the sensibility which his critic likes; the imagination that his critic thinks more than mere fancy; the invention which produces the wares that his critic would buy. But, after all, the days of monopoly in demand as well as in supply are over in these matters. Others are entitled to say, “Softly; he can, if you please, feel and imagine and invent *for us*. If you do not like the pearls, leave them for those who do.”

I can, however, imagine a demur to something like this effect—“You are refusing and endeavouring to ignore the distinct charge, brought by an eminent critic, that Gautier’s literature is *not* literature, but a mere transposition of another art, a sort of literation and articulation of painting, sculpture, architecture, etc.” On the contrary, nothing will give me greater pleasure than to meet the enemy on this ground. It is no new one: in fact it is much wider and much more trodden than some of those who choose it seem to think. You will find the most made of it by a critic a good deal older than M. Faguet and now far too much forgotten—by Gustave Planche. Planche was, I think, the first to recognise, and to attack with a combination of vigour and subtlety not often attained since, the set of nineteenth-century poetry and nineteenth-century literature towards the audible and the visible, and away from the purely intelligible. Once more, I am

not going to shift the challenge, or to ask at any length whether this separation of audible and visible from intelligible is not a begging of the question. But everybody must see that the charge brought by Planche (mainly against Hugo) is the same as the charge brought by M. Faguet against Gautier; and some people at least will see that the whole fortunes of nineteenth-century *belles lettres* are at stake under the argument and the decision of it. That is much too large a matter to enter upon here: it is enough to indicate the general connection of the lesser subject with the greater, and perhaps, by bringing them together, to strike out the suggestion of a new and useful handling of this lesser and more immediate subject itself.

I confess that when I read some estimates of Gautier and remember what he actually did, I am as nearly astonished at the ingratitude or the short-sightedness of critics as it is possible for a person to be who first read Gautier, not many hundred yards from these walls, some forty¹ years ago. The book on Spain which as I said has extorted reluctant admiration from M. Faguet himself dates, be it remembered, from the very year in which Mr Ruskin first made his appearance, equals the things that Mr Ruskin did not do at once, and surpasses those which Châteaubriand, alone of men, had already done in the same kind. He discovered the *Melencolia* some thirty or forty years before Mr Pater and James Thomson. The advantage which he had of being able to deal with railways and steamboats and suspension-bridges when they were fresh and wondrous things, and their ugliness had not been complicated by banality, was no doubt great and a little illegitimate: but I do not find that it has been quite so happily utilised by our geniuses of the present

¹ Now close on sixty (1924).

generation in respect of motor-cars and tramways¹. And what is more, though I doubt whether it is not an aggravation of his offence in the eyes of those whom he offends, you know that he would have found no difficulty with the tramway and the motor-car, the submarine and the aeroplane themselves. Not because, as his detractors grudgingly admit, he was a master at once of the *tour de force* and of the *tour d'adresse*, but simply because he had no need of such mastery. Whatever he desired to put into literature became literature by the mere fact of his desire. You know how certain friends and pupils and successors of his endeavoured to improve upon his style and especially upon his epithets: you know Flaubert's herculean and suicidal effort to get the *only* epithet, and the subsequent determination of the Goncourts to get the epithet which is not only the only one, but which is the private property of some particular personality, which is "*his* thunder" and nobody else's. The last of course was a caricature; of Flaubert few people are older admirers or more fervent admirers than your present lecturer. Yet even Flaubert's success (and how much more the others'!) seems to me to pale before the inevitableness, the nature, the ease of Gautier. His style is an O of Giotto: and like the original O, the simplicity of its perfection and the apparent lack of effort in producing it, have made some doubt its value. It seems as if a certain amount of charlatanry were absolutely necessary to make genius go down with some folk. Not too much of course: but some. Now about Gautier there was no charlatanry whatever. He had of course rather more than perhaps he need have had of the tendency to paradox, to exaggeration, to

¹ Or since with things of much greater apparent powers, aeroplanes and submarines (1924).

the *épatement* of the *bourgeois*, which has been a besetting sin of the nineteenth century, and does not seem to have at all died out in the twentieth. Part of it no doubt was habit—affectation even to a certain extent, though not to the extent of the charlatan. But more was natural: and probably nearly all the affected part was but a protest and a letting-off-of-steam under the vexations of his task-work, while the natural part was a genuine development of his peculiar humour. For Gautier had humour: he is even one of the chief of the not very many Frenchmen who have had it; and it is one of his chief titles to fame, while it is also perhaps not one of his least titles to the dislike and misunderstanding of those who have failed to appreciate him.

But he has another title to this dislike and misunderstanding which is stranger—the alleging of which may seem an extravagance and even an impertinence, yet which I believe can be made good. And this is his unique perfection in that not perhaps enviable function which we have assigned to him—the function of the Man of Letters of All Work. There are some high-fliers who would question the worthiness of any one who condescends to be a Man of Letters of All Work at all. Why does he not shake off the chains he bewails? Why does he not choose some higher vocation and stick to it? This is noble if mistaken. But I am afraid that there exists a much larger class whose objection, though rarely quite avowed, is distinct in both senses and certainly cannot be charged with any nobility. “What business,” they would say, if they could be got into the Palace of Truth, “what business has he to write with this desperate perfection on any subject that he chooses to take up, when most people find it so exceedingly hard to write, with even tolerable

merit, on one or two?" The man, who writes—who confesses or boasts or laments that he has written—something like three hundred volumes, ought to be either a mere brazen-bowelled pedant or a more or less perfunctory hack. Now when you are in this frame of mind it is not difficult to pass from it to another—that of denial or dubitation about the fact of this unaccountable and disquieting phenomenon. After all they find themselves (or at least we find them) asking, "*Is he so impeccable? Is it not a supposition, a delusion, a fraud?*" Or if honesty and ability together fail, as in the case of M. Faguet, to come to such a conclusion, "Cannot we find some sets-off? Is not he poor in ideas? Is not his imagination merely fancy? He describes admirably, marvellously, incomparably no doubt: but does he ever invent? Is not his a 'Much Ado about Nothing' after all?"

Add to this the great number of those who will not take the trouble to find out for themselves, and the not very small number who wish to be different, to be in a newer fashion, to get rid of any troublesome person who has been called just. Add perhaps (if one may speak as a fool) the fact that it is not exactly the first-comer who is in a position to appreciate the excellence of such a writer as Gautier. Add the lapse of years, and the rush of the new generations, and other things: and it is not very wonderful that though he has certainly not "perished," his reputation should be passing through a period of occultation and partial oblivion. It is more than possible that he has lost his contemporary public: and at least possible that he has not yet gained his permanent one. There are men of earlier, older, greater reputation who have done the same: indeed there are comparatively few whose reputations have not had this experience, and these few

have sometimes owed their escape to considerations as much accidental as essential, as much non-literary as literary.

We cannot—and if we could we need not—say much on Gautier's life. The general facts are fairly well known—that he came as a child from the extreme south of France to Paris; that he was as unhappy at school as French boys (to their greater unhappiness in another sense) seem generally to be; that he studied and practised painting with an ill-success due to short-sight—or something else; and that he then took to the great refuge of the destitute—the press—and wrought in that galley for more than forty years. His enemies have usually devoted more or less accentuated sniffs to this transference of allegiance. If they had had not only the wit but the knowledge, they would probably have suggested that the corruption¹ of the painter was the generation of the poet and the pressman; as it is they have usually given the spite of the suggestion without the salt of the formula. Another suggestion of the same amiable kind has been made to the effect that he was justly sentenced to article-writing because he could do nothing long. To the former point we shall have to return. As to the latter, why should he have done anything long? except on the fallacy—the worst of critical fallacies—that if a man does not do or is not something or somebody different from what he actually does and is, it is because he is an inferior person. Gray and Poe—two persons of at least distinction—have argued seriously for the preeminence of short things, at least in poetry; and others very different from Gray and Poe have expressed themselves decisively against long things. Have we not just

¹ And what a *corruptio optima* it is that gives us Gautier and Thackeray and Hazlitt—to stop at those (1924).

learned, some of us perhaps without the least surprise, that Mr Herbert Spencer could not understand how anybody could read Homer? Did not the Signor Pococurante (in a more pointed fashion certainly) express his profound disagreement with anybody who could read and enjoy Dante and Milton? Has not Macaulay at once expressed doubt of anybody getting to the end of the *Faerie Queene* and proved that he himself never did get to the end of it? I do not agree with any of these very clever men: but it is not because I think a long poem any better than a short one or a book any better, as such, than an article. Is the prose, long or short, is the poem, short or long, *good*? Does it give its moment or moments of literary satisfaction to the examiners? That, and that only, is the question.

A philosophical biographer may, if he pleases, discuss the problem whether it was most lucky or unlucky for Gautier that he began literature exactly in the middle of the ferment of 1830. In a certain sense no other time could have been more suitable to him and few could have suited him so well; it was in a way the hour for the man as but few men have had their hours. On the other hand, his natural tendencies hardly wanted the stimulation of the momentary atmosphere: and there can be little doubt that this stimulation provoked, and to some extent established in him, a habit of exaggeration, of deliberate unconventionality, of *charge* in fact, which not only stood him in very bad stead as far as ordinary success went, but also to some extent unduly coloured his work. That he was never of the Academy was certainly a much more serious matter for the Academy than for himself, though perhaps he did not, latterly, think so: and it is impossible to imagine anybody who could better have completed the trinity of reproaches to that body with Molière (in

regard to whom he used to indulge the juvenilities just referred to) and Diderot, whom he resembled in so many respects, though he excelled him as much in taste and literary faculty as he fell short of him in what it is almost sacramental to call "ideas." His first fruits or nearly his first fruits—*Albertus* in verse and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in prose—were undoubtedly fruits bitter in after-taste and after-effect to himself, because of their bitterness to others at once. But it may be questioned whether the unforgivable sin in the case of nearly all those who do not like him has not been, not so much the text of poem or novel, as the Preface of the latter. Now this Preface—comparatively inoffensive except in theory—is a great literary and critical document. It is not free, unfortunately, from that element of exaggeration which has been noticed: it has flings and *boutades* more than enough. But in its substance and in part of what is not its substance, it is in effect a reasoned manifesto, an argued defence, of the principles of a very great part of modern criticism. These principles had been put, this manifesto had been published, it is perfectly true, in the Preface to the *Orientales*. But Hugo never could argue; Gautier, though it has been denied, could. And with all the drawbacks just admitted of exaggeration, want of seriousness, fling and what-not, this Preface will remain a serious critical document, a *point de repère*, for the view (which is undoubtedly a view of the truth if only of one side of it) that you must not "travel out of the record," that a thing is to be judged in its own kind, and that the kind of literature is not, as such, the kind of ethics. Something further, however, might emerge or have emerged, if there had been anybody at once acute enough and impartial enough to perceive it, from a comparison of the poem, the novel, and the

Preface. Such a critic might have regarded *Albertus* as a fantastic extravagance in subject and treatment alike; and have felt the gravest disapproval of the book where the name is translated from Latin into French. He might be hopelessly "on the other side" in the contention of the Preface. But he could not (or at least he ought not to) have missed the extraordinary literary craftsmanship displayed in all three, and certainly not least in the Preface itself. He must, unless he had been blinded by prejudice and partisanship, have observed that here was a young man—a very young man in more senses than one—who had a mastery of the pen very seldom achieved by the most accomplished veterans; a man who could say whatever he wanted to say, who could put violences and paradoxes without any sense of effort, who could make the unfamiliar familiar without any elaborate apparatus, who possessed the art of saying very complicated things quite simply, and yet with the utmost possible completeness both of conception and of decoration.

There is no doubt which of the lines thus initially struck out Gautier would have liked himself to follow. He always called himself by preference a "poet": using the word no doubt partly in the loose German sense which covers fiction not merely in verse but in prose. He always, there is still less doubt, liked best of all to be a poet in the proper sense, and to write verse. He did actually produce an amount of poetry greater than that which has secured, for some poets who did nothing else, a high and durable reputation. But these poets have never lived of the altar of poetry—if indeed any poets ever have so lived throughout their career; and it was apparently necessary that Gautier's pen should feed him. Therefore he had to do something else, besides if not instead: and it is one of the most

curious instances of "World's Cruelty" to poets that it practically refuses them an avocation at the same time that it refuses to maintain them in their vocation, while (by a corresponding severity on the part of the Muses) the avocation constantly seems to choke and stunt the vocation itself. Yet in Gautier's case this latter result at least followed only partially. That aversion to "visible poetry" which I noticed elsewhere has made some critics very unfavourable towards his verse; but to others it seems of extraordinarily high quality. The cuckoo cry of "No ideas" pursues it of course; yet I have known critics, very much more exclusively devoted to philosophical poetry than I can pretend to be, who have thought very highly of the *Comédie de la Mort*. And if he had not, with that too frequent habit of provocation which has been acknowledged and deplored, entitled his latest and best volume of verse by a title challenging comparison with the plastic arts, I do not think that any one, save of malice prepense and irreconcilable, could have refused no small dose of ideality to the imagery of "Affinités Secrètes" and "Contralto" and "Tristesse en Mer" and the "Château du Souvenir." Nor is there, except in an uncatholic and indeed irrational proscription of all but a very small class of ideas, any lack of them in the earlier and much less well-known examples of his verse. Those—and they are probably the great majority—who only know the famous "Barcarolle" and the equally famous piece on the difficulty of art, would be surprised to find how many equals these pieces have in the produce of Théo's rare hours of freedom from article-writing, and how constantly there appears in all his verse the characteristic which we shall single out later—the marriage of reality and of dream.

But the novel? There, it may be said, was a business

not too degrading or inartistic, just entering on its period of highest consideration if not exactly of greatest profit, already fairly profitable, capable of supplying daily wants without too wearing a waste of daily labour, and with a far greater prospect of permanent and not merely fugitive literary renown. As a matter of fact, of course, Gautier did write a considerable number of books in prose fiction: and he never repeated the challenge to propriety which he had flung in his first long work of the kind. His novels contain some of his very greatest literary achievements—in fact hardly more than one or two of at least a dozen can be opened without the certainty of finding these. His two volumes of short tales are pure nectar: there is hardly anything of the kind that is superior to them, even in French, from the literary point of view.

But the literary point of view is no more that of the novel-reader than it is that of the theatre-goer as such. The famous old joke by which Émile de Girardin is said to have soothed his friend's disappointment, "the subscribers are bothered by the style," has no doubt a very great amount of truth in it. There have been times when it was fashionable to profess to relish style, few, when it was common to do so as a fact. But this of course is not a complete defence, especially in the case of Gautier, whose style has nothing perplexing or cryptic about it. Some of the charges of defect made here are more valid than they are elsewhere. Few novelists have been equally adepts in all the four novel-gifts of Plot, Character, Dialogue and Description: and perhaps there is no one of these—save, in the restricted case of the novel proper as distinguished from the romance, that of Character—which is indispensable. Now Character itself—seldom the strongest point of the French—was

nearly Gautier's weakest; he pays very little attention to Plot, and however great he may have been as a talker, he certainly does not shine very much in Dialogue except from the side of humour, where he is sometimes excellent. Description of incident and scene, and a certain indefinable Orientalesque tale-telling faculty, are all that is left him: and these things, though they will carry a man victoriously through a short tale, will not carry him through a long novel. One may find a great many things to say for *Le Capitaine Fracasse*: indeed the circumstances of its production are almost enough to account for its shortcomings; but it is certainly hard to defend it as a whole, and having done all that I could in that way five-and-twenty years ago¹, I do not think it necessary to do it again. The opening of the *Château de la Misère* is incomparable, and the duel of Lampourde and Sigognac hard to beat: the rest can be read with interest but scarcely insists on being so, and is in part something of a *pastiche*. In fact no one of Gautier's longer stories—to use the admirable French idiom—*enfists* the reader—seizes him and will not let him go. Even *Fortunio* has something of this lack of grasp: though most of the shorter stories possess it decently and some triumphantly. But it would be a foolish piece of bravado to challenge for him as a novelist in the full sense, or as anything but a tale-teller in a sort of prose lyrical vein, the highest or a very high place. His qualities as well as his defects refused him this. He could never have pleased the vulgar enough to obtain their money: and he could appeal but to a few of the non-vulgar with a certainty of their applause.

¹ In one of my *Fortnightly* "Essays on French Novelists," reprinted in the volume of that name and substantially reproduced in my *History of the French Novel*, Vol. II (1924).

But if the Muse of the older and greater fiction could not, and She of the more modern and popular would not, enable Gautier to live, there remained "our own correspondent"—to use a phrase of the English writer who at once in agreement and in difference most reminds me of Gautier, that is to say Thackeray. And to this resource, which was itself every day becoming more popular, and at least less unprofitable, the Preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* pointed unmistakably. Its main gist was critical; and criticism was becoming almost a profession by itself in France. But the innumerable digressions and divagations of that remarkable document announced, in their less happy as well as in their more happy turns, in their flings as well as in the moments when they are really "for thoughts," the born writer of articles—the man who stands to the more pretentious and leisurely of essayists exactly as the essayist seemed, to the disdainful eyes of Ben Jonson, to stand to the still older writer of books. Such a man writes, and is bound to write, of what he presently meets, or finds without choice, indeed writes sometimes of things that he would much rather not choose, and constantly at moments which he would very much rather were not immediate. For one of the most imposing and profitable occupations of this kind of writer Gautier was utterly unfitted; and he never would attempt it. He cared nothing whatever for politics—had indeed rather a horror of them, especially in their modern forms—and it was rather fortunate for him that he was thus minded considering his time and country. But for almost everything else that can be "articled"—book or play or picture; scenery, manners, cookery; things at home and things abroad—he was ready, adequate, for the most part how much more than adequate! And so this Samson was bound to the

pillars—the pillars which as he says somewhere pleasantly “support the weight of the news and facts of the day”—in other words the short thick *feuilleton* columns grouped at the foot of the French newspaper.

Not that he compared himself to Samson; for, except in his favourite vaunt of Herculean fisticuffs and consecutive metaphors nobody was less arrogant than Gautier. But the chains—though they slackened and lengthened to the extent of a pretty considerable range of travel, and tightened in the intervals to the daily dreadful giving of that criticism in which he never would say what he did not think, but was at once too amiable and too much under orders to be able to say all that he did think—these chains were never struck off. He could write a little poetry to please himself and those whom the Gods have made poetical enough to enjoy if not to produce it; a rather larger amount of prose fiction which was a sort of compromise between pleasure and task-work; and a positively vast amount of task-work pure and simple, in some of which he may have taken more or less pleasure, but which he clearly never would have undertaken as he had to undertake it, if he had been his own master. Of the three hundred volumes which he assigned to himself, not much more than thirty have been collected and reprinted in book form; but there is little reason to doubt that the larger estimate is only playfully round-numbered. It has been calculated that an English journalist of the upper class, who is industrious and finds full demand for his wares, writes about four volumes per annum of a full-sized library octavo pretty closely printed. Gautier’s forty years of press-work would on this scale make a hundred and sixty of such volumes, each of which holds nearly twice the amount of the average French

yellow octodecimo—and this is as near an approximation to Théo's three hundred as the severest and most arithmetical Quakerism can demand.

There is no need to trouble ourselves here with the astonishing labour of love by which the indefatigable M. de Lovenjoul has succeeded in compiling two large volumes of *Bibliographie Gautieresque*—for the score or two of collected reprints supply ample material. In a sense, and if any one reads for knowledge, which is the Law, instead of for pleasure, which is the Gospel, almost any volume will do: for the quiet and yet, as it has been called, desperate perfection is over them all. Even the paradox and *charge* of the earliest utterances die down; the author seems to have kept them for the conversations which still scandalised the grave and precise at the *dîner Magny* and elsewhere. But the power of observation, and the power of expression, remain and increase. Everywhere, from the glow and flush of the *cénacle* period through the infinite labyrinths of intermediate press-work, to the ineffable melancholy of the *Tableaux de Sièges*, this placid mastery displays itself. The Titan is pretty early weary; but he never staggers. We have not very many letters of his; perhaps, like some other men to whom the pen is a sort of crank or hand-treadmill, he did not write very many. But M. Maxime du Camp has printed one, written from St Petersburg in discomfort, distress, disappointment of a manifold kind, in which he tells his sister that he has got through a *feuilleton* somehow and “it is all right.” It always *was* all right: the “virtue of the right balm” (as Mandeville would say) never failed him whatever he wrote. He was perhaps, though not in the least an Anglophobe, least happy in writing about England—first because he, who shivered even at Paris, was daunted partly by the facts and

much more by the fictions as to our climate; secondly because, like most Frenchmen of his time and some still, he had a notion of the moral condition of Albion which was almost as chimerical; and lastly because he could never get rid of that singular *misprision* of all things Anglican: religion, politics, architecture, cookery, spelling, history and what not, which made one of his friends charge Queen Elizabeth with the execution of Raleigh, and another lay upon Mr John Burns the quite undeserved reproach of being a chief of the Præraphaelites. But even in and on England he is often happy: and elsewhere and on other things he is hardly ever anything else. He had very much more reading and knowledge of various kinds than it was, and perhaps still is, the fashion to credit him with; he had a wonderfully wide-ranging and sensitive apparatus of receptiveness; and he had the most marvellous range of expression, considered from the point of view of adequacy and unerringness, that any man ever had.

The very greatest in literature may hit things that he cannot reach: but he, after his merest apprenticeship, never misses what he attempts to hit. Take things so different as his famous (or should be famous) survey of French poetry in 1867, and as the chapter about the dancing dervishes in *Constantinople*, not one of his best reputed travel-books. They are about things as different as any two themes that a pretty lively imagination can hit upon: but they are both done absolutely to perfection. Hundreds of critics have attempted surveys of the kind or of similar kinds. None has ever kept the difficult razor's edge between politeness and assentation so exactly, or clothed criticism with a more golden garment of phrase. Hundreds of writers, from very great to very small, have written about these actual dervishes; yet none has left any-

thing half so effective as a presentation or so admirable as a composition. And what we say of these we may say of all. Have only enough literature not to be "bothered by the style" and you cannot help experiencing from Gautier the simple, fundamental, passive pleasure of literature itself wherever you take him up. Have a little more and you cannot fail to double that pleasure by the more active one of appreciating the craftsmanship—which would be diabolical if its magic were not so absolutely white—of the execution and method by which your pleasure is increased.

And always—after the first caricatural and humorous effervescence—the taste behind this expression is worthy of it. Gautier may not like all the things we should like him to like: but he never likes grossly or ill. From the scores of sketches—so amiable and yet so subtle—of the *Histoire du Romantisme* and the *Portraits Contemporains* to the appreciation of turtle-soup in *Caprices et Zigzags* he is wonderful: and the way in which, in this last case, he confesses the gradual but total vanishing of national prejudice and sense of strangeness is unique. Here was one of the rare critics who, in no effeminate or *fainéant* manner, submit themselves to the effects of art: who are neither incapable of receiving impressions, nor rebellious to them, nor driven to feign them, nor incompetent to express what they have felt.

The reasons of his perpetual want of pence, though not wholly intelligible, are partly so, and almost wholly honourable to him. The vulgar scorn of Émile de Girardin at the folly of the man who might have taken bribes and blackmail to the extent of thousands a year and did not is one of the greatest tributes that has ever been paid to a journalist: though I am not sure

that M. de Goncourt's innocent amazement that the artists whose fortune Gautier had helped to make had not given him more valuable presents is not as great a one. He had absolutely nothing of that singular combination of genius and, let us say, strict attention to business which is so remarkable, and which some fervent Hugolaters have found not quite so pleasant, in Hugo. If he was as careless of strict morality as of strict prudence in incurring family obligations, he never shirked them. At one time at any rate the payments he received were ridiculous; the admirable articles of *Les Grottesques* brought him, it is said, twenty pounds for a half-score batch at the time when, in England, first-class Reviews were paying fifty or even a hundred for single papers not as good as the worst of them, or as long as the shortest. All that he ever received in the way of pension—he, one of the only three very great men of letters who did not break with the Empire or at least carry on a Fronde against it—was a hundred and twenty pounds a year for its last seven years. Indeed, though he was nothing of a politician, politics were fatal to him. For, as we know on his own authority, the expulsion of the Bourbons cost the family its private fortune; the Revolution of February interrupted his own prosperity at the only time when it can be said really to have existed; and the collapse of the Empire dealt him the final blow. Whatever else he may have had of Bohemia in him, he had neither its idleness nor its extravagance: and though it would not be true to say that he never stood in his own light, his escapades and his peccadilloes were punished by a sheer bad luck which has spared men of far graver faults, far fewer virtues, and far less genius. Yet perhaps what he himself calls “cette sensation de bien-être intense et de joie sérieuse que

procure, même aux moments les plus tristes, la contemplation du Beau" had, like other things, to be paid for.

Yet I for one am neither content to resign him, nor under much fear that he will have to be resigned, to that collector's bookcase where M. Faguet bestows him with the thoughtful provision of a pretty binding, in the very singularly selected neighbourhood of a Wouvermans (about the last painter of whom Théo would ever have made *me* think) and near to a rare enamel (which might go better with Gautier but goes equally oddly with Wouvermans). I admit that the disqualification of having executed (as he says himself of Tintoret) "acres of masterpieces" is a serious one—at least for the two large classes to whom (as the proverb has it) you should not show half-done work and who are equally incompetent to judge vast masses of work done well. But I am not quite misanthrope enough to believe, or young enough to pretend to believe, that these two classes compose humanity. Always sooner or later, though more often no doubt later than sooner, true criticism gets and holds its way. And, as was said at the outset, I have not the smallest doubt as to what is true criticism about Gautier. His most determined foes, as we have seen, admit his form; and it is only mistake, assisted no doubt a little by some bravados and humorous excesses of his own, that can belittle what is inside the form. Even if one granted—what I am far from granting—that he could only "transpose" other arts into literature, think what a province his would-be dethroners estate him in! *Only* surmount the barriers which seem to have been set between the careers of the senses! *Only* allow the mind's eye, without that of the body moving from study or library, to see and to enjoy all the beauty of

nature and art! *Only* make inarticulate music articulate, and present the imitation of sculpture, in all but the actual round, to the conception! *Only* build afresh St Mark, and the Escorial, and St Sophia, in substances not made with hands! Or look at the other allowance that they dole out to him. He can *only* achieve in French effects which professed and hostile experts in that language confess themselves never to have thought possible. He is *only*—as his own idolaters had said and as these iconoclasts repeat without knowing it—the “absolute magician” in the use of his own language. Truly this is a very odd sort of belittlement; a most curious result of cross-examination *not* to credit!

But there is something more and much more, which these depreciators naturally do not allow—which indeed if they had seen they could not depreciate, and which not all or most of his admirers have thoroughly brought out. In a very early and a very beautiful poem (one I think of his very best) the *Chimère*, Théo himself puts the old complaint of the impossible which has found so many exquisite expressions (with Marlowe’s famous lines as the most exquisite of all) and ends it

Car je veux voir mon rêve en sa réalité.

And though he is not one of those writers who constantly use catchwords, you will find this contrast of *rêve* and *réalité* repeated more often verbally in his work than has, I think, been generally noticed, and constantly recurring, in sense or suggestion, without the actual form of words. Now it is this constant sense of dream in him, with the equally constant endeavour to bring reality as near as possible to it, and the frequent if not invariable felicity of expression keeping the two before us, that gives Gautier his charm—a

charm to me almost unique. M. de Goncourt accuses his style of *matérialité*—a charge which, if it ever was utterly justified, was justified in respect to the style of the Goncourts themselves. It is no doubt the attendant danger, if not the besetting sin of all the very pictorial styles. The plastic artist himself is absolutely condemned to a certain materiality; his masterpiece will be a mere *chef d'œuvre inconnu*, and scarcely that, if he tries to get rid of it altogether. The artist in music is the freest from it: though he has others to fear and to fall into. But the man of letters, especially the prose man of letters (for the poet has his own music as an antidote and counter-spell), is, whenever he attempts to touch the visual and auditory nerves of the mind strongly, in very great danger indeed of materiality. And he can best escape—if it be not true that he can *only* escape it—by the help of Dream—by *disrealising*, by infusing the vague, by letting things float and flow rather than by bombarding his reader with them.

This is what, as it seems to me, Gautier always more or less succeeds in doing, and sometimes does with success altogether marvellous and unequalled. His success is no doubt most easily perceptible in his travel-books, and therefore they have been the most popular; but in his novels (where as has been said he neglects plot and character too much), in his criticism, in his infinite miscellaneous writing of all sorts, it is quite as perceptible, for those who will give themselves a little trouble and training to see it. Perhaps it is all the less obvious because of its essential qualities of quietness, ease, absence of *tapage* and *bravura* and executive display. The very terms *tour de force* and *tour d'adresse* which have been used are as out of place with Gautier, as they are in a different order of style with Mérimée,

and as they are perhaps *in place* with men so great as Flaubert and even as Hugo himself. It is only after the caressing pleasure of the work has been felt for some time that you can even bring yourself to think of the artistry of the worker. His effects "rise like an exhalation"; they are not hammered and mortared and craned into place and structure. And because all this goes on just the same in an article on an ephemeral subject as in an elaborate book, people decry it, belittle it, refuse to see it. Such a definition as the marriage of Dream and Reality by means of Expression may seem to them pedantic phrasemongering or precious absurdity. Yet I at least do not know a better definition-description of the higher literature: and I do not know many except the very greatest, who have carried it out as Gautier has in prose and verse alike. He was, it may be, only a Man of Letters of All Work: but in all his work he was a Man of Letters in this best and rarest meaning.

XI

ANATOLE FRANCE [1923]

SOMEWHAT more than forty years ago a reviewer, in turning over his monthly packet of French literature, found himself, before he had read more than a page or two of one of the volumes, in the *Paradise* which good writers keep for good reviewers, but which, so far as new books are concerned, is not open every day, or every month, or indeed every year. The author was not unknown to him—otherwise he would have been a very incompetent person to be trusted with such a job, seeing that the name had figured among the Young Guard of the *Parnasse* in verse, and elsewhere in prose, for some years. But though there may have been earlier premonitions it may be doubted whether there had ever been such a vivid, if not yet complete, revelation of what was in M. Anatole France as was given by *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*.

The exact nature of the revelation may be a matter of debate between any two chance-comers; and their opposing views (*if* they are opposed) may even correspond to, if they do not actually cause, difference about the whole character of the author's work. To the present writer, then and ever since, M. France appeared and has continued to appear as a new embodiment, Avatar, exponent, or anything else you please, of French style—as giving the quintessence thereof; as returning to the idea, the “substance”—in the philosophical and theological sense—of the literature and the language, the country and the people, together with its special properties and the most characteristic

of its "accidents." There was a pretty story; some charming and much amusing character; two nice cats; incidentally some sound criticism. But however charming these things might be in themselves, they did not make the charm of the book: for you could find as good elsewhere, as Bacon observes of flower-beds and tarts. What you could not find—even in those of the giant race before the flood of the Terrible Year who still survived, was the perfection of style in its widest sense according to the norm peculiar to, and characteristic of, *French*.

For though, of course, it would be absurd to claim any monopoly in the recognition of the fact—it is doubtful whether it is universally recognised that French has a style of its own as distinct from that of its individual writers; and that it is almost the only language that has. Greek and English have no special style, because they have all styles; Middle High German had the beginnings of one but lost them utterly. Latin had indeed something like a special style of its own, whence it comes that Latin prose is so much more difficult to write than Greek. And whether the other daughters of Latin have retained and developed this or not, French certainly has. When Rivarol said that the language had a "*probité attachée à son génie*" he was only thinking of the *clearness* which it undoubtedly possesses. But certainly, whether it merely developed (Petronius is a rather suspiciously lonely witness for development) or added from Celtic and other sources, it has many more possessions than mere clearness.

And these additions help to produce a closer *liaison* between form and matter in French style than in any other. French can do almost anything; but there are certain things that it does only by, in its own phrase, *a tour de force*. It can be magnificent—in *Roland*, in

Agrippa d'Aubigné, in Hugo; but in the first we feel that it has not become wholly itself; in the second that the author is an eccentric; in the last that he is a giant as well as a god in the literary religion of his own country. It can be passionate; but Gastibelza and the lovers of the Marquésa d'Amaëgui and the *innominata* at Saint-Blaise, though they speak exquisitely with the tongue of French, do not speak with its peculiar spirit. That spirit has been excellently defined—though in regard to the French people, not the French speech of Paris—by the master whom all competent criticism has recognised as M. France's own, by Voltaire in *Babouc* as *doux, poli et bienfaisant, quoique léger et médisant*. There is an additional characteristic in the original which we will here omit, though the enemies of France (the country) have laid undue stress on it.

It is characteristic, and perhaps necessarily characteristic, of this style that there is something a great deal more in it than mere phrase. It is true that "phrase-maker" as a term of abuse or depreciation is absurdly misused. One has seen it applied to Flaubert; whence it would follow that the character of Emma Bovary, and the great phantasmagoria of the *Tentation* are merely phrases. It might be applied to the Goncourts. But to apply it to M. France would be simply ridiculous. As with all the practitioners of specially French style—like the best of the *fabliau* and farce-writers; Rabelais when he is not at high-jinks and sometimes when he is; Saint-Évremond; Hamilton—that extraordinary loan of ours to them—Molière, Voltaire, and others since—a great sobriety of actual "phrase" and a miraculous counter-profusion of suggestion, innuendo, association, mark M. France always more or less; always without exception when he is at his best. Sometimes, especially in his later books, he forgets. For

instance, in an early page (12) of that curious hit-and-miss, *La Révolte des Anges*, he suggests comparison with Voltaire, and comes out second best. Zadig's experience with metaphysics is admittedly one of its author's pearls, "Il savait de la métaphysique ce qu'on a su dans tous les âges, c'est à dire fort peu de chose." One may turn that over in one's mind at intervals for a lifetime, and it never loses savour, even though that mind itself may by no means despise what "comes after things natural." Now, M. France writes: "La métaphysique ou les métaphysiques—c'est à dire ce qui est joint aux physiques et qui n'a pas d'autre nom; tant il est impossible désigner par un substantif ce qui n'a point de substance *et n'est que rêve et illusion*." Voltaire would have stopped at "substance" and kept the point without the splutter.

Although after *Sylvestre Bonnard*, if not indeed before it, no competent judge could doubt, and no one, honest as well as competent, deny that a new storyteller of the first magnitude had arisen in France, there was a time when one was apt to think of him more frequently as a critic. There can have been few periods when a more interesting trio of reviewers, for comparative enjoyment, presented themselves to the fit reader than MM. Ferdinand Brunetière, Anatole France, and Jules Lemaître. No dishonour is intended to MM. Scherer and Faguet who occupied a somewhat different position: though a fresh trio might be made up with them and M. Brunetière again, so that he formed a sort of centre from which the others diverged. He represented the disciplinary and logical side of the French nature—logical, that is to say, when you allow it a big bundle of postulates and axioms to start from; he was essentially a critic of standards. M. Lemaître, on the other hand, was a rather glaring example of a

characteristic of his nation which enemies have called frivolity, and which Voltaire admitted by adding something about "vanity" in the description above quoted in parts. He was amusing enough to read if you could tolerate a kind of smart schoolboy wit and occasionally a schoolboy ignorance; but he could do little more for you.

Between them the writer of things afterwards collected as *La Vie littéraire* and *Le Génie Latin* (composed of "introductions" to various classics on a somewhat larger scale) showed to singular advantage. That masterly command of the most central and distinguishing mode of his own language, which was noted to begin with, could hardly show itself better than in criticism. When you read for the story, the man who gives it you need not write any better than Paul de Kock or Ponson du Terrail, if he *does* give it you. Style in history is a great *bonus*—so great that it will make up for a very scanty dividend of truth; but it is not the *unum necessarium*. It may rather be doubted whether in philosophy some crabbedness or cragginess of style is not superior to *beleidigende Klarheit*, such as Nietzsche attributed to Mill.

But in criticism if once more (and fortunately for some critics) not necessary, it is at least a very great advantage. Further, the prejudices and morbid appetites which have affected M. France in politics and religion seem to do him little harm in regard to pure or even rather impure literature; and he has some general principles which are as sound as general principles in literature can be. Paradoxical as were those curious discussions with the unlucky *eidolon*, Prof. Brown of Sydney, which M. Gsell reports, the condemnation of the demand for what is called originality in genius is thoroughly right. It is true that when

M. France says that perhaps ninety-nine parts out of a hundred, nay, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, in Victor Hugo's genius are owed to others, you make a simply knock-out retort: "But it is the thousandth part that makes the genius." Still, it is quite possible that M. France merely did not say that. Anyhow, his discharge of the main duty of the critic, to show people who care to be shown what one fairly qualified mind thinks of the produce of another, fairly qualified or not, was as a rule admirably and almost always delightfully performed. People used to compare him with the English critic who afterwards came into contact, not to say collision, with him about Joan of Arc, but whose *esprit* he himself, in writing about folk-tales, found *particulièrement agréable*. There were, indeed, not a few likenesses between them—in the expert command of each over his own tongue; in the alertness of their mental attitude; and in the adjustment of that attitude to the purposes of impressionist criticism in the best sense of that term. Of the differences there is no room and not much need to speak here. And this is perhaps fortunate, for the discussion would turn largely on the illimitable and irreconcilable difference between French and English standards of the most mysterious of mysteries—Taste.

I doubt whether there are to be found anywhere four volumes (nay five, if you add the longer constituents of *Le Génie Latin*) of genuine *causeries*—genuine newspaper articles, that do not even in the usual small volume and large print of French fashion cover more than half a dozen, or at most a dozen, pages—which are so full of delight as these. It was not the fashion among M. France's English contemporaries to reprint such things, though I see that this fashion, rather dangerous but with luck agreeable, is coming back with

us. In France men have, at any rate for something like a century, reprinted their criticisms as regularly as their portions of tales. You may find in others more edification, in the way of solid knowledge of the authors treated, than M. France imparts to you, but hardly anywhere more fascinating stuff of the kind itself. The Preface of the third volume in which he defends himself against M. Brunetière's charges of levity, subjectivity, and the like, is not only very sound argument on its own side but delectable reading. You may sometimes wish that the author had displayed in some respects a little more of the boldness of which he is so lavish in others. Thirty years ago, it still required some courage to take Baudelaire seriously in his own country, but M. France's apology for him (the term here is appropriate in all senses) had been far outgone by mere Englishmen years earlier. He is again unsatisfying on Flaubert; the reason in both cases evidently being that both require, though you may laugh at them as well as love them, to have the love and the laughter kept well apart. About Verlaine, on the contrary, M. France is much more to be trusted, because the opportunities for taking *him* not seriously are so numerous, constant, and almost incredible, that the ironic treatment is seldom out of place for more than a moment. But in the enormous majority of cases one thinks much less of the subject than of the writer and the writing. When he made that assignment of "particular agreeableness" to Mr Lang it was a case of "De seipso fabula."

M. France, however, whatso'er the additional merits and the occasional failings on his part, is "in his heart" as much a novelist as Mr Pumblechook was a corn and seeds man, and the book or books which came after the collection of the criticisms gave the amplest evidence of this.

La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque may possibly, as regards the present writer, who has, however, taken some pains to correct possible "idolatry of the study," have something of the same prejudice of favour which, as has been confessed, attaches to *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, and which includes one or two others yet to be mentioned. It also came to him in a miscellaneous bundle of French books for review, and here also he said to himself, "This will do." Nor has a thirty years' later re-reading in the least affected this conclusion, though it may have slightly affected the terms of reasoned judgment. The *Rôtisserie* is probably the last (it is certainly one) of the placed runners—placing here is fortunately not confined to three, and there are no dead heats—in that long and glorious relay race, the novel-writing of the French nineteenth century. It is not only one which shows its writer's powers at their most characteristic, fullest, and best; but—shifting from the point of view of the mere critic to that of the mere reader which the mere critic too often forgets to take—it is the most interesting. The *Crime*, delightful as it is, had been something of what the French themselves call a *berquinade*, something written with—oh! call it not squinting but double vision—on the young person and the Academy. It had been charming; but a tolerably catholic amateur in literature, without in the least wishing for anything naughty, might wish for something in which the author gave himself freer play. In the book of which we are now speaking M. France does this in a method almost always delightful and with results almost always happy. There can be no question that in M. l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard he has added one to the inhabitants of the world of great novel creations. In this book, as not quite in the *Opinions*, and in his appearances and representatives elsewhere, Jacques Tournebroche's *bon maître*

lodges, and keeps, his pattern almost impeccably. Indeed, as a former Editor of the *Quarterly Review* said in writing of that "bright broken Maginn," who had a good deal of Coignardism in him,

Barring drink and the girls [*we*] ne'er hear of a sin,

for the "redistribution of capital" involved in the abstraction of M. d'Astarac's diamonds is set off by the two facts that the abstractor's salary had not been paid, and that the diamonds were sham.

If something was owed to a live model (as it probably was, though Verlaine is more disguised than in the Choulette of *Le Lys Rouge*), that does not interfere with the merit of the picture. Panurge without Panurge's ill nature; Falstaff with the addition of a great amount of quite genuine learning which the fat knight had had no time to acquire, and (to do him justice) could hardly have acquired in any case because it was not accessible; even not a little of Parson Adams in him, though in company with a good deal also that would have horrified that excellent clergyman and might have brought about a fight (what a fight it would have been!) between them—the Abbé puts in a diploma-piece such as few have lodged.

The charm of style, which seems in the famous old phrase "to caress itself against" the reader, remains at its highest; and the minor characters keep their goodness likewise. One might write a whole essay on the sketch of the young *seigneur* of the old régime in M. d'Anquetil. But of the many features of the book which any fit reader will find noticeable, perhaps the most striking is the long scene or act which, beginning by Catherine kissing her hand to Jacques Tournebroche, and thereby getting her ears boxed by Anquetil, passes through revel and bloodshed to the very leisurely and curiously incidented flight of the young gentleman,

the Abbé, and his pupil to shelter in the mystic *château* of the Rosicrucian-Gnostic Astarac, and indeed continues itself to the end of the book. If it could be contrived—though it would be difficult to bring it about except by accident—that a reader should have read all M. France's other books before the *Rôtisserie*, he would be hardly prepared for anything like this. For though there are touches of sarcasm and even of philosophising in it, it is on the whole a scene of action of almost Dumasian attachingness and "go." Instead of sipping M. France's usual *liqueur* for its flavours and "finishes"; instead of warily pacing the paths of his shrubberies lest you step into some trap, or crush some Mandragora of cynical unorthodoxy, you read fast and turn the pages to see what is going to happen just as if you were under the white napkin in the Bastion Saint-Gervais, or floating after the explosion of the *Éclair* with Mordaunt's hand on the gunwale. M. France does not often do this sort of thing; it is not his special vocation. But it is always well to be able to bisect your sheep as well as your bit of floss silk. Take from the same book again the end—the doleful but admirably managed end—of the Abbé and itself. One might have doubted M. France's ability to execute this so flawlessly; but the doubt is made ashamed of itself. And there is one flash which puts a streak in his *spectrum* different from any others, where Jahel (one would fain see more of Jahel) meets the reproach that she is the cause of Coignard's death, not with commonplace gush or anything lending itself to satiric construing, but thus: "Son visage pâle d'horreur et brillant de larmes [elle disait], Croyez-vous qu'il soit si facile d'être jolie fille sans causer de malheurs?"—even as Helen said—

Where'er I came
I brought calamity.

There is a glimpse here, and another in the end of *Le Lys Rouge*, of something greater, if not more delightful, than the author has ever actually given.

Except to those who enjoy M. France rather for his political and philosophical than for his purely literary characteristics, the *Opinions* will, perhaps inevitably, be a little less attractive than the *Rôtisserie* as part of the Jeromiad. On the other hand, even the Preface, the most argumentative part of the book, continually keeps the balance supplied by Acatalepsia and Ataraxia, the mistresses of his masters Pyrrho and Epicurus, better than do his later volumes. There is hardly anything better in the whole of this Anatolia than the conversation between the Abbé and Catherine the lace-girl under the porch of Saint Benoit-le-Bétourné, in which, despite her charms and coaxings, he refuses to take the part of her rascally friend, Brother Angel, and is punished, perhaps not altogether without some fragment of cause, by a loud complaint of too close attentions on the Abbé's own part. This, with the shocked rebuke of Tournebroke *père* that follows, and the exceedingly ingenious if not too relevant legend of St Abraham and his niece, in which Coignard excuses himself, gives us forty pages, lacking one, of pure contentment. Hardly anywhere is the author more like an exceedingly nice kitten, gracefully walking, climbing, playing about with charming soft and well-ordered fur coat reaching from its demurely pretty face to its elegant feet, and now and then exhibiting delicate mother-of-pearlish claws—claws which may even by some unlucky accident actually scratch now and then, and look as if they would like to scratch oftener than they do. And it is only fair to say, considering that we have admitted some slight excess of disregard of the young person (the *old*-young person) in M. France, that there would

hardly be a better sermon in conversation on the subject of ultra-prudery than that which the Abbé delivers while he is turning over Cassiodorus (probably the passage about *vinum acinaticium*) on the top of the library steps to the excitable gentleman who is scandalised at an illustration to Ronsard, with too few clothes on the figure represented.

Some people may possibly prefer even to the two Coignard volumes, *Le Lys Rouge* and *Thaïs*, the curious "foursome" which constituted the *Histoire Contemporaine* and comprises *L'Orme du Mail*, *Le Mannequin d'Osier*, *L'Anneau d'Améthyste*, and (perhaps most famous of all) *M. Bergeret à Paris*. I cannot agree with them. One may be very grateful for that youngest child of literature, the novel, and yet never read a political novel or story, whether concerning our own country or any other, without wishing politics out, however keen a politician you may yourself be. These books, indeed, also contain plenty of what has been called M. France's own *liqueur*—a kind of literary chartreuse, yellow rather than green, flavouring whatever may be the subject, from the amiable battles between Lucien and Zoé through all manner of domesticities and miscellanea, to the reconstruction of the psychology, as they would say now, of the dog Riquet—a Riquet of many tufts. There is, indeed, some "miching mallecho" here. But it is a relief from something else of which there is more. Uncanny and almost apocalyptic as it was in many ways, the "Affaire" was hardly more so in any than in making M. Anatole France dull.

The earlier volumes of the set with the coming and passing of Madame Bergeret (one does not like but is rather sorry for her), especially perhaps *L'Anneau d'Améthyste*, may present more reliefs to this perpetual

half serious treatment of 'ics and 'isms—politics, militarism, pilgrimages, clerics, anti-semitism, and what not. But the main thought left by the set in one mind rather habituated to criticism is "Well! perhaps a novelist, as good as M. France and freed by time and nature from M. France's preoccupations, will make a really great novel with these four not good ones for furniture—of background, not foreground—a hundred years hence." At present they are withered nests of yesterday, in which no bird of eternity has ever been hatched.

In some ways *Thaïs* is a cardinal book in the literary history of its author. When it first came out it created, one remembers, the beginning of that puzzlement which, intentionally or not, M. France has caused to accompany most of his later things as to what was his exact intention. It shocked the orthodox, of course, but it was, if we mistake not, pointed out at the time that there was no absolute need for the shocking. The beatification of Thaïs, in spite of her earlier sins, and the damnation of Paphnutius, in spite of some good deeds and infinite self-mortification, are both fully justifiable on grounds and arguments of the most undoubted orthodoxy. Her place is ready between Mary of Magdala and that other Mary, like herself "of Egypt," if not identical with her. On the other hand, when Paul the Simple, at the bidding of St Anthony, devotes Paphnutius to the demons of Pride, Luxury, and Infidelity, he again is fully justified. Paphnutius is, indeed, a person as unpleasant as he is sinful. It is evident from the first to the last that his self-imposed mission to Thaïs is undertaken for the sake of his own glorification much more than for that of her salvation; and, if not from the first, it very early becomes complicated by fleshly desire of an almost sadic kind. He

conducts her to her sanctification much less like a shepherd of the East and of poetry with coaxing and music than like a drover of Western prose and fact with stick and goad. One of M. France's most subtle and most characteristic touches is where after Paphnutius has sealed Thaïs's cell with ostentatious and privately impure ceremony, the Abbess Albina bids her maidens take the prisoner food and her accustomed flute. All his stylitism is pure vanity; he repeatedly rejects the counsels of his wiser colleagues as to less ostentatious modes of asceticism; and in his very prayers not to be damned, the uppermost and undermost thought alike is that it would be such *very* hard lines if he were. A most ingenious turning-point is that, while he notices that the demon-jackals and theorbo-girls trouble him less when he is engaged on the solid practical work of making a new cord to replace that which their mischief has destroyed, he never takes the lesson of this.

On the other hand, there is beyond doubt in *Thaïs* a good deal calculated to *froisser*—to irk and disturb—a strictly pious mind. Horn and hoof do not exactly flaunt themselves, but they are constantly appearing round the corner or under some flutter of vestment. There is very little positive "impropriety," such as that in which the later books fearlessly indulge; but there *has* been a terrible deal, and it is pretty freely referred to. The supper at Cotta's is rather Trimalchionic; and chiefly distinguished by the fact that the guests are more like gentlemen and much more like philosophers. Their philosophy is of an exceedingly unorthodox kind. Paphnutius is too sulky, too much engrossed with Thaïs in divers manners, and perhaps not quick-witted enough to make any show for the Church; and Christianity, if you call it Christianity,

is represented only by Arians and Gnostics. Moreover, an orthodox person with eyes in his head must soon perceive that the figure in the book who is given, if not the best part, the one which the author likes best, is the half-Pyrrhonist, half-Epicurean Nicias. Nicias is generous, good-natured, proof against the sulky brutality of his schoolfellow, Paphnutius. And when he takes leave of Thaïs and her rather questionable saviour, the author puts into his mouth some of the finest work—perhaps *the* finest, for the euthanasia of Thaïs is more “done to pattern”—of the book. In fact, there are few Anatolian beauties which one would select before the whole scene where Nicias—after paying the last attentions to the philosopher-suicide, Eucrites; leaving the symposium, turned half orgy, half tragedy; rescuing Paphnutius and Thaïs from the mob—suffers the splutter of the monk; says farewell to the beautiful light-o’-love, who is herself saying farewell to the world; describes the state of both with not unkindly or unsympathetic criticism, and meets the merry laughter of his girl-slaves as he comes to his own house with the reflexion, quiet in its gloom, that Death after all is but the last page of a book which you are still reading.

Admirers—M. Gsell tells us somewhere, if not in these precise words—admit that most of M. France’s novels are not so much novels proper (or even improper) as philosophical discussions sandwiched with incident, conversation, and caustic comment. Perhaps the one least exposed to this description is *Le Lys Rouge*. There are some excellent things in it. The least important perhaps, but not the least remarkable, is that the author, one really believes for the first time in the long and brilliant history of the French novel, has drawn an English woman who is a live, possible, and rather agreeable human creature. Miss Vivian Bell says

“darling” rather too often, and, being a she, she would be more likely to be named Vivien or Viviane, but these are purposely selected nothings. The great fact remains, whether due or not to some personal experience. To go up higher, the promenade or rather wandering of Thérèse and Robert when they have left (as it happens in her case for the last time) his *garçonnère* after one of their stolen meetings, is strangely affecting. There is no notice stuck up, “You had better pay attention to this”; but there is an atmosphere which tells you as much. And the interest, which at the very beginning of the book is small, grows steadily. It is true that Thérèse, Countess Martin, is a doubtfully pleasant person, that she has followed and is to follow in the wake of those innumerable heroines of French novels who seem to take the marriage ceremony as a public notification that anybody may now ask, and almost anybody have, the privileges indicated by that ceremonial, but absurdly restricted to one. This goes, of course, for nothing. But she is rude to her husband, which, we have always understood, is contrary to the best rules of the game; and she “plants there” a most respectable lover, as such lovers go, whose only fault, besides that involved in the situation, is that he sometimes leaves her to foxhunt on the primeval system of himself pulling the fox out of the earth by the brush. She is, however, punished by the ways and moods of her “second,” the sculptor Jacques Dechartre, and appears to be left at the end in the (for such a heroine) impossible and intolerable condition of a loverless life. (When will some one have the wit to write a novel round the negative of Madame Bovary’s famous exclamation, “*Je n’ai pas d’amant*”?) But the book is not one to be left with a jibe. A very severe critic may demand that this curious character of Thérèse—a sort

of born spoiler of her own sport and everybody else's; a kind of feminine and very unsacred Ecclesiast who feels and knows that all is vanity but cannot keep herself out of it—should be dealt with on a higher plane. But this is the old mistake of demanding better bread than is made of wheat, and seeking not so much noon at fourteen o'clock as fourteen o'clock at noon.

When things have settled down—which in literary criticism takes from about two to x generations to come about—it is probable that unfavourable estimates of M. France will fasten chiefly on that curious trio of books which principally represent the decade before the Great War, *L'Ile des Pingouins*, *Les Dieux ont Soif*, and *La Révolte des Anges*. From a superficial point of view they represent sufficiently striking differences. The first is nothing if not amusing; the second, but for a certain undercurrent of aim and execution, might almost be called dull, and is more and more tragical; while the last piece is a curious compound of the satiric comedy of *Les Pingouins* and the satiric tragedy of *Les Dieux ont Soif*. This last-named book, indeed, may almost puzzle the most experienced, most catholic-tasted, and most shock-proof among critical readers. A complete survey of the novels of any moment which have taken the French Revolution for canvas would not be ill worth doing; and this book, if it did not give the reader most pleasure, would certainly try the critic not least. If M. France were a reactionary one could understand it better; for the gradual transformation of Évariste Gamelin into a monomaniac of murder for the sake of a Revolution which, except murder, has no principle at all, and has murdered its own murder-agents as soon as they were a little stale, has never been more powerfully drawn. The effect of this mania in exhausting or extirpating the sexual passion which

has been his sole human characteristic, is also an acute suggestion; and the rapidity with which his paramour consoles herself, though she is no mere light-o'-love, comes in forcibly enough to help drop the tragic-satiric curtain. But the book as a whole is overloaded with history, possesses hardly any story, and has little more than sketches of character apart from type.

The third book, *La Révolte des Anges*, has plenty of jesting free-thought in it and plenty of "sculduddery"; but there is much more story in it than in either of the others; there is a good deal of outlined if not fully drawn character; and M. France's inevitable and not seldom irresistible satire of all things human, and some others, finds clearer expression than in *Les Dieux ont Soif*, and more concentrated expression than in the book of the Penguins. The close, with the vision in which Satan dreams that he has changed places with God and is developing all the vices which Satanism attributes to Jehovah, or rather, "Ialdabaoth," while the former Almighty, under stress of misfortune, is becoming as admirable as Satan himself, has a certain majesty about it which M. France seldom aims at and therefore—for he is not apt to fail in anything he does aim at—seldom achieves. And the whole portrayal of the Revolt, though a little obscure in parts, is an obvious satire on terrestrial anarchism, perhaps more double-edged than the author quite knew. The futility of anarchism of *any* kind may be held to excuse that of even great apostates like "Prince" Istar and the hermaphrodite Archangel Zita, from whom one is always expecting something that never comes. But the retired guardian angel Abdiel-Arcade, though amusing sometimes, is disappointing. He says he was well educated in Heaven, but he seems never to have learnt one of the very earliest rules of a decent education—always

to put back a book in the place on the shelves whence you have taken it. On the other hand, the scene in which he remits his guardianship under circumstances which seem rather to require strong exercise of it, and expresses his reason to Maurice d'Épervier his ward and Madame des Aubels, a married lady, is one of those which make almost any book of M. France's delightful, and which almost any other author would spoil.

Except that it also is rather too much of a *Livre à clefs*—a novel satirising political and literary history not to say individuals—nobody could impute dullness to the famous and probably long-lived, if not immortal, *Ile des Pingouins*. There is story enough if it be only in chronicle form; and there is amusement enough, though perhaps some people might wish that it were a little more varied in kind. Nothing of the sort could well be better than the scene where the soon-to-be-named Orberose undergoes the marvellous transformation effected by clothing, and not only offers no objection but suggests that she ought to be laced tighter. But this and other appearances of Orberose herself and the humanised Penguins give opportunities—rather too lavishly taken—for indulging in that error of M. France's novels which Diderot, of all people in the world, condemned so unsparingly and unanswerably in regard to the *Lettres d'Amabed*. It is true that *Amabed* is dull while the *Ile des Pingouins* is not; but when one is reading it the words of the author of *Jacques le Fataliste* keep singing in one's ears. The *Pingouins* certainly cannot be said to be *sans goût*, *sans finesse*, *sans invention*, as for once Voltaire permitted himself to be; and it would be excessive to say that M. France ever permits *himself* exactly “un rabâchage de toutes les vieilles polissonneries que l'auteur a

débité sur Moïse et Jésus-Christ, les Prophètes et les Apôtres, l'Église, les Papes, les cardinaux, les prêtres et les moines." But there is something rather too like this; and the old doubt will not away. Supposing nobody believed in certain things, would this kind of fun remain funny? The other sort—the *grivois* or *gaulois* sort without any anti-catholicism—is indeed safe from this very damaging question, because what it turns upon is essentially human. But is it not rather easy and rather monotonous? And when some of our school reformers have attained their object and made conversation about certain matters part of a liberal education, will not the matters become as uninteresting as brushing one's teeth?

As the short story is, or till recently was, almost as much a French speciality as claret or sardines; and as M. France is one of the most specially French of Frenchmen, it might be supposed that his short stories would be extra-special. And so they are sometimes, but not always. The curse of purpose—the foot-and-mouth disease of the novel, spoiling its talk and hindering its progress—is perhaps more virulent in the short than in the long story; and of late years, at any rate, M. France has been sadly purposeful. Sometimes, indeed, his inimitable demure malice carries the purpose off as in the title story of *Crainquebille*, where the submissive mystification of the unhappy costermonger forms, as it were, a screen on which the successive events, the subordinate characters, and the whole thing are thrown in that peculiar magic-lantern fashion, of which, if the author has not exactly the secret or the monopoly, he certainly has an unparalleled command. *Pierre Nozière*—itself not much more than a short story, composed of *historiettes* still shorter and approaching *Sylvestre Bonnard* in a general character—

is not much below that. The division in which Pierre dines with the journalist, nearly falls in love with his wife, and alas! succumbs wrongfully, if not to Venus to Bacchus, is French Dickens, and Dickens at his Copperfieldian best. And this is hardly less the case with not a few of the curious "Bergeret" pieces, where M. France, as one can hardly remember any one else doing, projects on the film part of his own self, his own experiences, his own opinions, without exactly giving us fragments of autobiography or parabases like those of Fielding and Thackeray. But he does "preach" a good deal here and elsewhere, and the statements of fact as well as of opinion are sometimes startling. "Les travailleurs ne demandent rien et ne reçoivent rien," says M. Marteau, another of the mouthpieces of M. France himself. Our author was, we believe, born in 1844. It would be really obliging if he would point out, for the benefit of some contemporaries fairly acquainted with public affairs in France and England, at what time since that date *les travailleurs* have *not* been demanding constantly and receiving at least a large proportion of what they have asked. But M. France is not exactly the sort of person one argues with. If he were he would hardly wake the wild raptures of laudation which secularists and anarchists give him sometimes.

Anything like extended notice of the largest, most serious, and most laborious work of our author (already glanced at) would be out of place here; but to leave it with only that glance would be impossible. To say that while it is not lacking in those charms of form which we expect from him, the *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc* is not so full of those less charming tones and colours which might be expected is perhaps stingy, but not quite unjust. To speak still more frankly, one does not seem

to see even the most agreeable and accomplished cat as quite the appropriate biographer, historian, or critic of mice. It may seem blasphemous to call her whom that true Englishman at her trial applauded, wishing she were English, a "mouse"; and hard lines on mice to compare them to the corrupt and sanguinary pedants who tried her. But she was a saint, long before she was gazetted as one; and they were theologians. Now, M. France likes nothing better than playing with saints and theologians as a cat plays with mice. But Joan was from the modern, if not strictly from the contemporary, point of view, French; and she was a girl of the people; and she made royalty and the Church and the nobility look disgusting—from all which points of view she appealed to him. Besides, it has been impossible for any good person, from the Englishman at the trial downwards, not to love Joan, though they say she was curiously unapt to excite amorous feelings of the usual kind. So M. France does little more mischief with her than to point out what mere "hallucinations" her "Voices" and the rest of it were, and to resort to psychiatry for help. But as one reads one remembers that if the psychiatry of the fifteenth century (for after all her trial, ostensibly at least, was this) seems worse than worthless to that of the twentieth, the current variety may possibly seem the same to that of the twenty-fifth. It is curious how often ironists forget to apply the invaluable "corsive" (as the old medical term went) of irony to their own methods and conclusions. Practically the book is a sermon on the text:

Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum,

in two volumes, delightfully written in a curious mosaic of M. France's own dialect and the ancient documents partially modernised. As to rigid exactness any one

who compares Mr Lang's notes with M. France's text may possibly decide that it is not the novelist's strongest point.

There is, however, another "serious" book of M. France's which removes any suspicions that its title and authorship may create in a much more decided fashion. It is a commonplace to praise the book-buying habits of the French. But there certainly can have been few more remarkable instances of this than the fact that *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, which was, I think, published in 1895, had reached its 114th edition in 1921. For the book is neither a book "of occasion," nor (except to very small extent towards the end, where there are a few Dialogues of the Dead, etc.) one of fiction, nor furnished with the faintest touches of that slightly illegitimate *haut goût* which sometimes spices his dishes. It is more like an eighteenth-century book than anything at all recent that we can think of; suggesting Vauvenargues with more style and humour if with considerably less orthodoxy, and (rather more closely though in French instead of English) the most good-humoured and least aggressively controversial essays of Hume. Politics, at least the petty politics of the moment, hardly appear at all, most of the book, if not all, having evidently and most fortunately anticipated the "Affaire." Almost the only place where M. France is ecclesiastically aggressive, even by sap and mine, is where, in a curious apology for nuns, he tells monks that he will have nothing to do with *them*. The book is in fact a series of short quasi-philosophical discourses on man, woman (about whom M. France is a little more positive than the wisest philosophers allow themselves to be), life, the universe, the other universes, and anything else that may or may not exist. It might be possible to cavil at the title, though it is

a very attractive one. But we really know very little as to what was talked in the Garden. One of the great poets of the world, it is true, is one of our sources about Epicurus and Epicureans, but somehow, though more than one of M. France's characters is fond of Lucretius, there does not seem to be much likeness between the Latin poet and the French novelist themselves. Does M. France or M. Bergeret ever mention another of these main sources, Philodemus of Gadara? He would surely enjoy the complaint of one editor of the Gadarene fragments that in one place at least it is exceedingly difficult to know whether it is attack or defence. But this is really irrelevant. Suffice it to say that the book is a very agreeable one of tempered scepticism, marred only, to speak without any paradox, by sometimes not having scepticism enough. *Nous savons* is a very frequent phrase in it. If it is hard to "believe," is it easy to "know"?

"But it is now time to take leave," though fervent Anatolians may think that much more ought to be said and that some things have been said wrongly. We saw the other day M. France spoken of as a "serious thinker," who was afraid of an outburst of *Fascismo* in France. With the latter part of this we have nothing to do save to observe that one 'ism is rather apt to provoke another. But is he exactly what one would call a serious thinker? And there again one is stopped by the imminence of the unmanageable previous question, "What *is* a serious thinker?" So let this part of the subject be left to others to decide. Fortunately, it is not necessary that the world should be entirely occupied by serious thinkers, though it is as well to have a few of them, and perhaps we might have a few more without harm. Certainly M. France has thought enough, even if one sometimes wishes it took

other directions, to prevent his other gifts from being spent on mere frivolities. And in themselves they are gifts nearly, perhaps quite, of the very first order in their several departments. There may be something "academic" (one does not quite know why there should not be) both in the display, and in the enjoyment as such, of that style with which he was credited at the opening of this paper. But if so it produces and encourages other enjoyments in which any intelligent and even slightly educated persons can, and in which it is clear many such persons do, rejoice. There is an *insinuatingness* about him which one finds it difficult to parallel elsewhere. Sometimes the countenance of his work may be *nimum lubricus aspici* in the Arnoldian rather than the original Horatian sense of the adjective. Sometimes he would seem to be not so much a serious thinker as a mischief-maker with the serious thoughts of others. But almost always he is a Master of the Laugh; and Heaven only knows what Earth would do without Laughter¹.

¹ I invite comparison, quite unapologetically, with what I said of M. France some thirty years ago (*vide sup.* p. 277). It was rash of Charles V (and he got punished for it) to say "Time and I against any two." It is not, I think, discreditable to any of us to say that Time and M. France have got the better of me—though there was not much even then for them to do. The article was written with a continuous perusal or reperusal of almost the whole work (1924).



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